The Interactive Guide to Straight Razor Shaving

SECTION 1, GETTING STARTED WITH A STRAIGHT RAZOR 10

Section 1 - 1, Why a straight razor? 10

Section 1 - 2 - DE VS Straight - Which one for me? 12

Section 1 - 3 - Ok, I want a straight razor, what do I need? 16

Section 1 - 4, Shavette, what is it? 17

Section 1 - 5, What is a shave ready razor? 20

Section 1 - 6, Straight Razor FAQs 22

SECTION 2 - SELECTING A RAZOR 24

Section 2 - 1, Different parts of a straight razor... 24

Section 2 - 2, Grind 25

Section 2 - 3, Width of Blade... 27

Section 2 - 4, Type of Tip/Point... 32

Section 2 - 5, Which part is which? 37

Section 2 - 6, Carbon VS Stainless Steel... 40

Section 2 - 7, Razor Brands The New, the Vintage and the bad! 42

Section 2 - 8, What to look for when buying a second hand straight razor 44

Section 2 - 9, Things to look for when selecting a Custom Straight Razor 51

SECTION 3 - HONING HOW-TO'S 54

Section 3 - 1, How to lap/flatten your hone. 54

Section 3 - 2, Creating the initial bevel.... 64

Section 3 - 3, Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge 69

Section 3 - 4, Finishing via Hones... 70

Section 3 - 5, Finishing via abrasive pasted strop.... 76

Section 3 - 6, Sharpness Tests Vs. Edge Uniformity Tests - Bevel Creation Guide 80

SECTION 4 - DIFFERENT HONES EXPLAINED 84

Section 4 - 1, What do you need and what's recommended? 84

Section 4 - 2, What does a slurry stone do and what are they? 88

Section 4 - 3, Norton 90

Section 4 - 4, Coticule 91

Section 4 - 5, Belgian Yellow Coticule New & Vintage 92

Section 4 - 6, Belgian blue 95

Section 4 - 7, Chinese 12K 95

Section 4 - 8, Barber hones 97

Section 4 - 9, Spyderco hones 102

Section 4 - 10, Kitayama 105

Section 4 - 11, Thuringer 107

Section 4 - 12, Arkansas 107

Section 4 - 13, Shapton 110

Section 4 - 14, DMT 110

Section 4 - 15, Chromium III oxide 110

Section 4 - 16, Abrasive Pasted Strops 111

Section 4 - 17, Dovo Tortoise Special Hone Comparison/Results 113

SECTION 5, STROPPING HOW TO'S 120

Section 5 - 1, Selecting a Strop 120

Section 5 - 2, How to Hold a Strop Without a Handle 125

Section 5 - 3, How to use your hanging strop 128

Section 5 - 4, How to take care of your strop 131

Section 5 - 5, Applying paste to a strop 132

Section 5 - 6, How to Restore a Strop 136

SECTION 6, THE STRAIGHT RAZOR SHAVE 148

Section 6 - 1, Holding the Straight Razor and Blade Angle 148

Section 6 - 2, More Straight Razor Grips 150

Section 6 - 3, Straight Razor/The Do's and Don'ts! 155

Section 6 - 4, Straight Razor Tips and Tricks 156

Section 6 - 5, A Basic Straight Razor Shave 158

Section 6 - 6, Video of a straight razor shave. 168

Section 6 - 7, Common Shaving Problems and Solutions 169

SECTION 7, THE STRAIGHT RAZOR SHAVE 170

Section 7 - 1, Caring for your Carbon or Stainless Steel Razor 171

Section 7 - 2, Caring for your Razor Scales 173

Section 7 - 3, Metal Polish and Straight Razor 174

Section 1, Getting Started with a Straight Razor

Section 1 - 1, Why a straight razor?

Simple--it works, it works better than any other method/means of shaving ones face, it's fun, it has a bit of danger attached to it, the razors can be incredibly gorgeous, there is a craftsman attached the creation of a razor, most other men & women are impressed by the notion that you shave with a straight razor, it's a throw back to simpler times of yore, but for most, and it's the tremendous feeling of self accomplishment. Taking a blade YOU put the edge on, and getting a buttery smooth shave is like tying your own fly-fishing flys, and catching a fish every time. Shaving with a straight razor isn't easy, but on the same token, it really isn't that particularly difficult. Keep in mind every shaven man for centuries used a straight razor. Surely it cannot be more difficult than what we are troubled with today, like driving cars, and figuring out Microsoft Windows Vista! For most users, shaving with a straight razor is a wonderfully calming experience.

Straight razor shaving is neither scary, nor dangerous; it merely (like most things) has a learning curve attached to it. If you grab a random man, and assume they've only used an electric razor their entire life, if you give them a new cartridge razor, 99 of out 100 times they'll figure it out, and get a decent shave, thus the selling point of cartridge razors--there is zero learning cure. Take the same fella and give him a new double-edge razor, and he'll probably figure it out, but he might have a nick or two the first time he gives it a go. He might not get as close a shave as he would with a cartridge razor, however given a week to get used to it, he'd be doing exceptionally well. Now, a new straight razor, give that to the average fella off the street and they probably would have NO interest in touching the thing to their face. Let's say they did however. Their "new" straight razor would more than likely not be sharp enough to get a decent shave from, and the average man will have no idea how to properly strop, hone, and shave with a straight razor. DEs, cartridge razors, and electric razors are popular not due to them delivering a superior result, but due to having such an easier, more direct learning curve.

Straight razor shaving, again, although not terribly difficult, DOES have a learning curve attached to it, and there is a lot of knowledge, and direction the average user needs in order to get decent, and pain free results. If for whatever reason, you just simply WANT to shave with a straight razor, WANT a challenge, and WANT to take the plunge and no one is going to talk you out of it, skip DE VS Straight page and go right on to What you need section. If on the other hand, you are currently using a DE razor (or cannot decide whether you want to jump into DEs or straights), and are looking into making the switch to shaving with a straight razor, read the DE VS Straight page.

The world of straight razors is exciting, interesting, challenging, and for most, incredibly fun!

Section 1 - 2 - DE VS Straight - Which one for me?

A vast majority of wet shavers started with a cartridge razor. Some used a Gillette Mach III, others used a different type of cartridge (Schick Quattro, BIC, Gillette Excel, Trac II, etc). Many shavers also come from the Electric razor world. The quest to find the right razor is unique for each of us. Some are discovering wet shaving following issues with their skin such as ingrown hairs. Others would try it as they are now tired of the cartridges price. It could be the closeness of the shave or this chore might be more interesting with different tools... Regardless of the razor that one would choose, you are here because you are looking for a better shave. Keep in mind that regardless if you choose a safety razor or a straight razor, you will achieve the same result.

There are Pros and Cons of using a straight razor or a safety razor. You should pick what sounds interesting to you. When you start using one of those tools, you should only pick one or the other. Your technique will need to be developed and improved. If you keep using the same tools, you will achieve better results quicker. Do not be afraid of the blade being exposed compared to a cartridge razor that would offer more protection. Safety razors are a bit safer than straight razors, so it might be easier for you to start with a safety razor. Straight Razors are cooler and more "old school". Straight

Razors require a bit more maintenance than a safety razor. Either tool will require more time at first to shave. Make sure that you will be ready to invest the time and efforts to learn this new way of shaving. Rare are the users that have a good shave on the first try; especially with a straight razor. The rate of success with a safety razor is higher. Do not be discouraged from trying a straight razor because of that.

Many shavers will comment on the sharpness of a straight razor as not nearly as sharp compared to a safety razor. You need to keep in mind that a straight razor sharpness relates to the razor itself, how it was sharpened and your stropping technique. It is strongly recommended to have a professional honing your first straight razor. That way, you will have an idea on what 'Shave Ready' means. The safety razor on the other hand has disposable blades. Those blades, depending on the brand, can be sharper, duller, rougher, smoother. Each have a preference and finding the right blade can be a tricky exercise. Depending on your razor, a blade can act differently. The same razor and blade could be different from a user to another. Now, it doesn't necessarily take a lot of money to get a good shave from a straight razor, but probably more so than the average DE setup. The big cost is in time. Within a few weeks, you can get incredible shaves with a DE. With a straight, it'll take months before you are getting shaves as close as you could/would within a week or two with a DE.

So why use a straight razor?

Some straight razor users will confirm that nothing else provides a closer shave. This largely depends on the user, straight razor, how it was honed, stropped, etc. The straight razor is an experience, a journey with a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction and accomplishment. Many

have/will try a straight razor and quit. Quite frankly, it is not a tool for everyone--heck for most people. If you hang with it long enough, it is a very rewarding experience.

One advantage of learning to shave with a straight razor, irrespective of whether you start with one or move to one after some time using a DE, is that the naked blade will instill a laser-like focus on your shave; you will be acutely aware of blade position, angle, the contours of your face. A lapse in this concentration will not be soon forgotten. As a result, your shaves--*with any razor*--will improve. In that respect, learning to shave with a straight is an investment in your shaving, not just a specific type of razor.

So if a straight razor is so good, why use a DE?

Compared to modern methods of shaving, a DE is leaps and bounds ahead of the pack. It is much less costly to operate, more fun, provides a significantly closer shave than other modern alternatives, with zero irritation (when done properly) and dramatically cuts down and usually eliminates ingrown hairs. The DEs also have a learning curve. They are ridiculously inexpensive and incredibly sharp blades are readily available. When a blade gets dull, to the waste bin it goes. It's simple and easy. A DE is simply a tool to mow facial hair. A Straight is more of an ornamental piece of history/art.

Now I am confused. So what do I do?

Many wet shavers will use either a safety razor or a straight razor depending on their schedule in the morning. Some only use one of the two exclusively. A vast majority believe that a straight razor will take more time in the morning than a safety razor. It depends on your experience. Some are as quick using either tool. As you are looking at starting this new method of shaving, pick the shaving implement that sounds best for you. If you have more time to spend in the morning, a straight razor might be suitable. If you are more rushed,

a safety razor might be more appropriate. Not everyone use a straight razor in their wet shaving life and that's all right.

Also bear in mind that it is not strictly an either/or proposition. Some members are quite comfortable blending the two: a first pass with a straight razor, and clean up with a DE. Or, more common while learning a straight, start with the straight razor and shave your cheeks (typically, the easisest strokes to pick up) and the finish with the DE. Over time, as you learn holds and angles that work for your face, you cover more territory with the straight until it is doing the full pass.

Before you change to a new way of shaving, always consider how you are doing right now. If your current shaving implement is giving you passable shaves, it might be more difficult to start with a different shaving implement. If you do not like the way it shaves right now, by all means, change your razor. There are some many models of safety razors and straight razors that it would be easy to replace them. As mentioned earlier, keep in mind that the more you change your equipment, the longer it will take you to get used to this new method of shaving. It can take months before you obtain the mysterious BBS (Baby Butt Smooth) shave regardless of what you are using. Do not be shy of asking questions on the forum if you have any issues or concerns.

The Straight with disposable blades

An item that seems like a good compromise between a straight razor and a safety razor is the straight razor where you put disposable blades. There are many models on the market, some are made by Feather, Parker, Dovo (Shavette), etc. This does sound good as you would be using the safety razor sharp blades with an item almost identical to the straight razor. There are many debate as some love their disposable Straight Razors where other simply prefer the real straight razor. This is a choice that only you can make. Keep in mind that a real straight razor is more forgiving than a disposable straight razor. The blade angle is easier to work with a real straight razor.

Synopsis

Merkur HD and Derby Blades

What do you want out of your shaving experience - Fun? Comfort? Efficacy? Self-sufficiency? Economy? Convenience? The simple fact of the matter is an outstanding DE shave is going to be about on par with a straight razor shave in terms of how smooth your face will feel. In the end, both will give the same results. When you will be experienced enough, you will achieve really close shaves with either tool. Will it get any closer? Probably not.

Safety razor or straight razor? which one for you? Simple! If you just want a really good shave, save yourself a lot of time, effort and trouble, get yourself a DE. You won't be disappointed. If you want to shave with a straight razor for the "allure", the ultimate results/experience, or simply just because you have a wild hair and nothing is going to get in your way, do not waste any time on safety razors.

Section 1 - 3 - Ok, I want a straight razor, what do I need?

This part is quite simple

1. A SHAVE READY razor. (See next section for more information)
2. A serviceable strop in good condition, ideally with 2 sides, one canvas and one leather.

3. A shaving brush to create lather with. (See the Interactive Guide to the Shaving Brushes and the review section to help you decide which one would be best for you)
4. A top quality shaving cream or shaving soap (See the shaving creams review section or the shaving soaps review section to help you decide which one would be best for you)
5. A good Aftershave (See the review section to help you decide which one would be best for you)

Optional

1. A means of keeping the edge sharp (abrasive pasted strop, barbers hone, or other finishing hone)

Section 1 - 4, Shavette, what is it?

Background

Sanguine X-D20

The shavette seems to get a bit of a bad reputation when it comes to their use. It's been said that they are a poor substitute to a regular straight, that they are a cheap imitation and not a quality product. that they will slice your face to no end, etc, etc, and on and on. I'd like to focus on the shavette, and hopefully dispel some of the often wrong ideas and other things said about them. I'll do this from the point of someone who only uses this type of razor for my straight shaves.

What is it?

Dovo Shavette

Shavette is the name of a disposable blade straight made by Dovo, and is not the correct name for any other disposable blade straights. These types of straights can cost from just a few dollars, and then run up into the hundreds of dollars for the better quality models. These types of straights have the same

features, looks, and feel of a regular straight, are used in the same manner, and when used correctly will give an outstanding shave. The only difference between the two is that with the disposable blade straight there is no need to deal with having to strop or hone the blade. Its a simple matter of just changing the blade, the same as one does with a DE razor. When it comes to changing the blade this will depend on the users beard type. Some will get just a couple of shaves, while others may get five or more, here it's a strict YMMV. Having tried quite a few of the disposables, I've found they seem to fall into either the good to excellent, or the poor to really bad sides. Don't let price decide which model is right for you either. I've found really good disposables for around $15.00, and some really bad ones costing $40.00 and more.
The main thing to look for is how good does the razor hold the blade. Is it a good solid fit, is the blade secure and is not going to move at all. Or is it somewhat of a loose fit, or will work its way loose. And does the razor feel good to hold. These are important features, and are something that you should notice right away. The razor should just feel right to you.

Different razors

Feather Artist Club RG

Feather Artist Club

The disposable straights that I now use are any of the Feather Artist Club straights, the new Feather SS straight, the Kai disposable straights, and any of the Parker straights. I use the Feather and the Kai straights in both the folding and the non folding models, and I have all of the Parker straights. The prices of these straights go from the Parkers, which are under $20.00, up to the Feather and the Kai straights which will be between $150.00 up to the $200.00 range. And I should point out that any of the mentioned straights that I use are all excellent IMHO. Starting with the Parker straights which are very inexpensive straights, they are very well made, and have a very secure blade holding arm. Once in place the blade will not wobble or move around, and the razor has a really nice feel to it. The Parkers use half a disposable blade which

is very easily snapped in half, and put in place in the razor. Use which ever brand you like and gives you the best shave results. The Feather's and the Kai's take their own blades which are put in place according to the directions supplied with each razor. In all cases blade insertion is simple and very easy to do, just follow the manufactures directions. The Feather or the Kai blades are made the same, and can be used with any of the Feather or Kai razors. Any of these straights provide a strong hold on the blade, which is a very important feature of any disposable blade straight. I found that using the Dovo shavette, the blade is just held in place with a piece of plastic sleeve which can allow the blade to wobble in the holder, and work itself loose over time. From the expensive Parkers up to the Feathers and the Kais, the blade is very secure. Once you've found the disposable blade straight that suits your needs, all that needs to be done is to practice and develop your technique of shaving with it. Any disposable blade straight is, and so is any regular straight, an open blade razor. They are both used the same way. So take your time and allow your technique to develop as you get comfortable with using this type of razor. Its been said that the disposable blade straights are less forgiving, and are quick to nick or cut you, while the regular straights are kinder, gentler, and more forgiving. Yes, I've found that to be true, and this is because no regular straight can be honed, or stropped to the sharpness of any DE or disposable blade. The trade off to this is the fact that any slight mistake might result in that nick or irritation. However with practice, experience, and technique, the rewards will be better, smoother, and quicker shaves.

Pros and Cons

Feather Artist vs. Dovo Shavette

I've found more pros than cons to using disposable blade straights. For one thing I don't have to worry about having to take the time and effort to hone or strop my straight, which IMHO is the only con of a regular straight. A quick change of blades and I'm ready to go, having to change the blade could be said to be the only con of using a disposable. The learning curve or course is longer and steeper than that of a DE, but the results are well worth the effort should the desire to straight shave are there. Of course there will always be those who say that having to hone and strop a straight are part of the ritual, and the lore, of using a straight. And of course they are right, and for them a disposable will not be the razor to use. That's the way they are, and they are not wrong to think that way. But for the person who wants a great shave without the hassle or the bother of having to get their straight ready for a great shave, the disposable blade straight is the way to go.

Section 1 - 5, What is a shave ready razor?

This exists as a separate section to reinforce how important this is. When you buy a new straight razor from an online retailer, or a brick and mortar store, it is almost never shave ready. If the retailer SPECIFICALLY STATES the razor has been honed and made shave ready BY HAND, or has been honed by a honemeister then you probably have a shave ready razor, however if the razor has never been opened, and has come straight from the factory, there is a VERY slim chance that the razor will be shave ready. Some will require just a light touch up hone, and others may require up to an hour (or more) of a skilled Honemeister touch.

THE most important key to your success with a straight razor, is starting with a properly honed, keen edge that someone (with ideally years of experience) has both sharpened and test shaved with. Simply buying a new razor, or picking up an eBay razor, is NOT sufficient, and will NOT yield good results. Also, don't be fooled, honing is NOT easy, hones are quite expensive, and you do not want to start off handicapped, not knowing if your razor is sharp enough. You will have a miserable time attempting to hone your first razor, and you will almost surely fail.

DO

- Get your razor (ideally) from someone on the forum who has been around for at least a year, and has a fair amount of posts. This isn't a sure bet but typically individuals who have been around for awhile, and who are relatively active/interested in the hobby are going to be significantly better at both honing, and helping you in your adventure.
- If you are buying new, make sure it has been honed properly. If not, send it out to be honed by someone who has been straight razor shaving for a while.
- Get the best razor that fits your needs, and your budget. Cutting corners, or "cheaping out" will not get you a good razor. Be HIGHLY suspect of a straight razor costing less than $40. The rule of thumb "you get what you pay for" applies to a certain extent in that the quality of the razor (shave-wise and fit & finish) tends to increase up to about $100 or so. After $100, most of what you are paying for is enhances aesthetics, custom features, rare or historical blades, and so on and so forth. This doesn't mean that you can't spend $40 on a nice razor on eBay in mint condition, send it out to be honed, and end up with a better shaving razor than a $100 (or more) new or used razor, nonetheless when selecting a razor, typically if it's going for close to, or more than $100 on eBay, it's doing so for a reason, and likewise with new razors. Do you need the flashiest razor out there? Heavens no! A plain handled new razor from Thiers Issard, or Dovo for example can be a superb razor for under $100 as well, but you'll be more interested and have more fun/excitement/pleasure using one that speaks to you design wise. Remember, pending you don't do anything silly with it, a straight razor will be a lifelong tool, and will supply you with a lifetimes worth of shaves. Do it once! Do it right!

DON'T

- Assume your razor is shave ready.
- Buy your first razor off of eBay, unless it has been honed, and is being sold by a reputable dealer.
- Try to hone your first razor.
- Cheap out on equipment. You don't need the flashiest things, but you DO want top quality, as a strop, hone and razor will last generations.

Section 1 - 6, Straight Razor FAQs

What should I get

It doesn't really matter which straight razor you get as long as it's "shave ready."

"Shave ready" means competently honed to an edge that, for the majority of

people, will be sufficiently sharp to deliver an effective shave. Note that different shavers will have different expectations of what they consider truly "shave ready" to be, but by and large you should be able to shave off the edge without any significant issues. Also note that it is increasingly common for sellers on auction sites to proclaim their razors are "shave ready" simply because they have observed that is how some razors are advertised. You are advised to treat such claims with skepticism. There is a maintained list of vendors selling "shave ready razors", but it is always best to check with the community before buying your first straight razor.

You'll see a lot of thoughts about this from a lot of shavers, but gentlemen have started out with everything from a 3/8 wedge to 5/8 full hollow to 8/8 wedge with very good success. The sizes are measured in inches from the top of the spine to the cutting edge. It doesn't really matter what razor a new user gets as long as it's legitimately "shave ready". Sure, a 5/8 or 6/8 is a nice starting place because of the relative ease of shaving and stropping of those sizes, but it is not a hard and fast rule. One quote from a new straight shaver concerning small razors was that his "3/8 razor was much easier to use in my noob hands". This is not typically an advised starter razor, but that gentleman had previously used a 6/8 and was not having as much success in his new journey.

The point is this:

- You do not know enough your about preferences (irrespective of how much reading you've done to REALLY know what you want),
- Being new to the process, you have a good chance of messing up the edge by dropping it or improperly stropping it anyway,
- You don't REALLY know that you are in it for the long haul, so get in as cheap as possible.
- Avoid buying your first straight razor on eBay.
- Consult this list to know if it's a a good or bad straight razor brand

Note

Spend some time on the boards researching who to listen to when they proclaim a razor "shave ready".

Disposable Straights

A disposable straight razor will either use a long blade or half a Double Edge blade depending on the model. Those straight razor using a disposable blade do not require honing or a strop. They are useful for a user who do not want to do the maintenance. Should you buy a disposable straight razors instead of a straight razor? It's a preference, both are different and have regular threads to discuss them. There are pros and cons for both type.

Strops

You will damage your first strop. Do not worry about that. To make the learning curve more manageable, new shavers can practice stropping technique with a butter knife. Because of the likelihood of damaging your strop, it is typically advised to get a cheap strop that will allow the new shaver to strop without fear of damaging an expensive piece of equipment.

In the case that you nick your strop, make sure that you still have a flat surface while stropping. Try to strop using your hand and if the surface still feel flat and you cannot feel the nick, it's good. In the case of a deep nick, use some glue to make the leather flat again. It might need a bit of sanding afterward to flatten the glue. For a small nick, use sandpaper to sand them out. A low grit (220) will fix the strop very quickly but the strop won't look good. If you want to keep the best appearance, try a higher grit (1200). I usually do a combination of both to erase the nick.

Honing

You do not need to hone a razor all that frequently, so that expense is:

- not really worth buying a full set of expensive stones for your own personal maintenance (unless you plan on buying a ton of eBay specials),
- not enough of an expense to be problematic in the long run anyway (especially after learning really good stropping technique),
- can be minimized significantly by utilizing pastes, a barber hone, or a couple of high grit stones.

Prospective straight razor shavers should not let this part of the maintenance intimidate them. However, do you need a hone right away? No, your first straight should come from a Honemeister to give you an idea on how sharp it should be. You can venture later in the honing process or maintaining the edge but learning how to shave with a straight, is a quest on it's own!

General Maintenance

Great stropping technique is the key to successful long term maintenance of your razor

The point of a strop is to:

- Remove oxidation,
- Draw out the metal (restoring sharpness),
- Align the edge (provides smoothness to the edge)

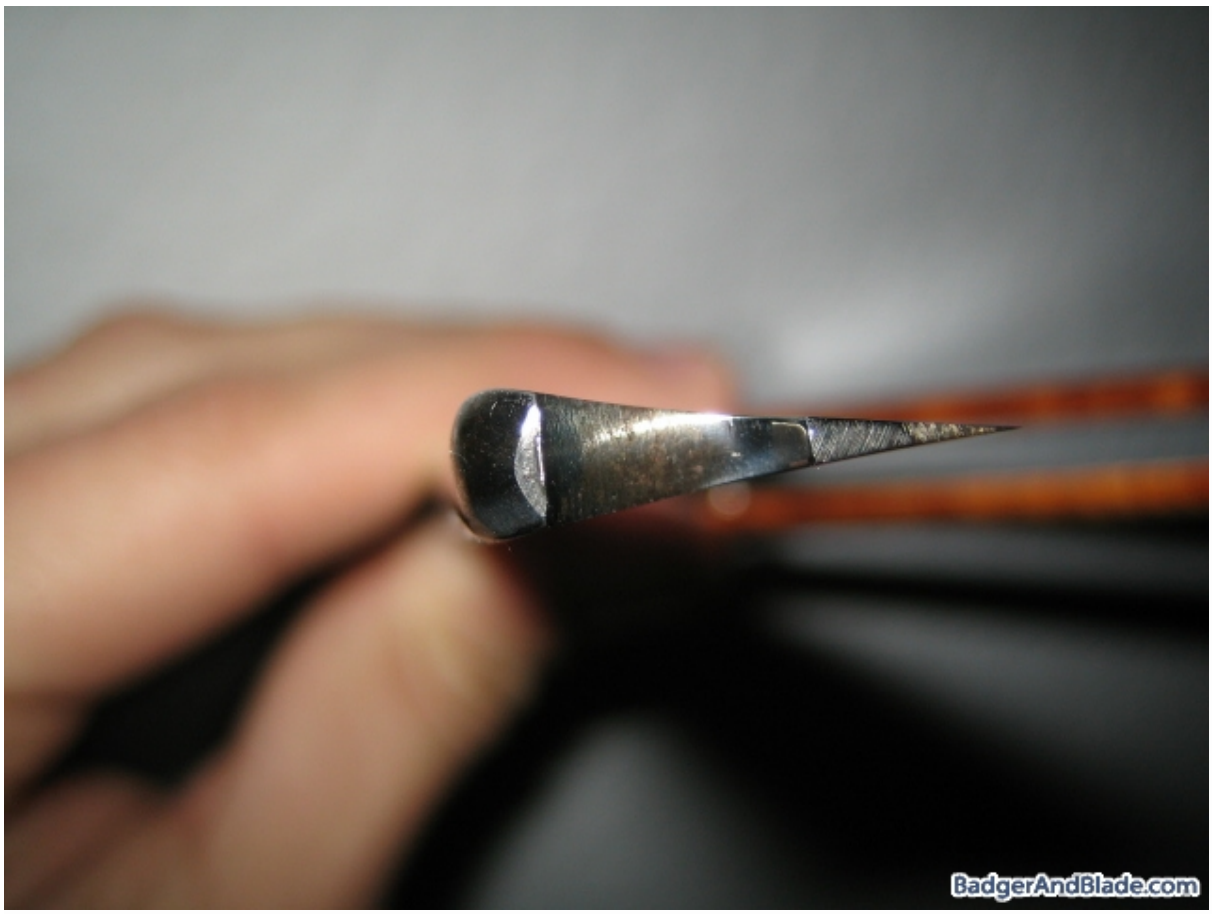
A single latigo strop will be the most cost effective way to accomplish all 3 purposes. However, a linen and horsehide strop will provide the optimal means of maintaining an edge accomplishing all three jobs quite effectively.

Section 2 - Selecting a razor

Section 2 - 1, Different parts of a straight razor...

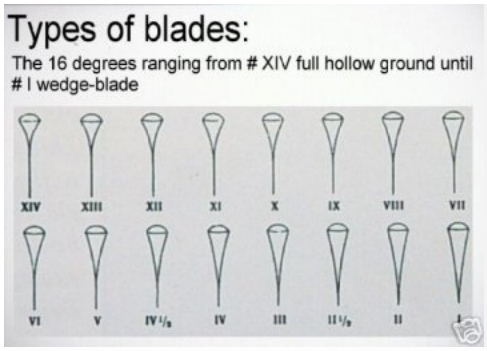
Some precisions to the above photo. The part marked "point" is also known as "toe". The area between the parts marked "point" and "head" can also be referred to as the "point". Just to the left of the part marked "shoulder", it is also known as the "stabilizer". The part marked "shank" can also be referred to as the "tang". The part marked "tang" can also be referred to as the "tail".

Section 2 - 2, Grind



The grind of a razor is essentially how the blade is designed, or rather, the particular characteristics. A "wedge" razor is going to be just that, a wedge. Wedge razors are both the heaviest, and the most robust razors, and are often the best for gentlemen with a very tough beard. Typically, the heavier the grind, the easier it will plow through tough beard growth, however due to the incredible stiffness of the blade, it will not contour to ones face at all, and these blades often do not provide as close of a shave as can be had with an extra hollow ground "singing" razor. If viewed head on, it appears to be a "triangle".

The opposite, or rather "antonym" of the wedge is the full (or "extra") hollow ground razor. Full hollow ground razors are also known as "singing" razors, as the sides of the blade are ground to such an incredibly thin sliver of steel the razor makes a singing note as it is stropped, or when the front of the razor (in between the head and the point) is plucked with ones fingernail. Hollow ground, or now often called "Extra hollow ground" straight razors are by far the most difficult razor to make, and as a result are often the most expensive. It takes many years of experience for razor makers to fine tune their skills/abilities to successfully make extra hollow ground razors, and even the most skilled straight razor makers often have to throw out a good percentage of blades they make, due to mistakes, breakage, etc. "Singing" razors are considered by most to be the closest shaving razors, as they're incredibly sharp, and incredibly delicate edges can actually bend/flex to the contours of ones face, thus allowing you to get THE closest shave possible.
As you can see, the full hollow ground razor has a MUCH different profile than a wedge.



There are also razors in-between these two categories, such as ¼ hollow, ½ hollow, concave, etc. Concave razors are exceptionally uncommon and are no longer manufactured to my knowledge (unless it is a custom one-off razor) so let's not waste time on those. Basically, the less metal ground out or "hollowed" the stiffer the blade will be in the case of straight razors. The less hollowed the blade, the stiffer the blade.

Typically for heavy bearded gentlemen, wedges, ½ hollow and ¼ hollow blades work best, but this doesn't mean a gentleman with a light beard cannot, or will not get an exceptional shave with a wedge--or visa versa--as a very heavy bearded fella can get a superlative shave from a singing razor as well. Grinds are more personal preference than necessity, but the basic rule of thumb is the heavier the grind, the easier to shave heavier beards; and the thinner the grind, the finer the edge, the closer the shave, and easier to hone as there is much less metal to remove.

Section 2 - 3, Width of Blade...

The width of the blade is the number typically expressed in eights of an inch, which basically means the width of blade from the cutting edge to the top of the spine. For example, an 8/8 blade would be 1 inch wide, where as a 4/8 blade would be ½ inch wide.

What is the difference between blade widths, or rather, what would an 8/8ths shave like versus a 5/8ths? Well to a certain extent it depends on the grind, but by and large, most individuals with heavier beards find larger (width) razors to work better for them, as there is additional weight/mass to the razors, which they find beneficial. An 8/8 razor will not have much feedback, and due to the size/heft of the razor will plow right through your beard. Many straight razor users prefer larger blades; because they do not have to be as sharp to get a seemingly effective shave. Personally I feel this is a lazy route. Larger razors also can hold more lather on the blade whilst shaving, so the blade does not need to be wiped/rinsed off as often, however I find this trivial and not much of a selling point. Large width blades are also quite popular as they are more striking (aesthetically) especially when they are custom, or Damascus bladed razors. The down side? Trying to put a 1 inch hunk of steel under your nose to shave your upper lip, or trying to keep it straight, and see where you are cutting on your sideburns isn't easy, and while not terribly difficult, it does take some additional time getting used to, so larger razors are usually recommended for intermediate to advanced straight razors users. The disadvantage to the 8/8" razor is precisely their selling point--their size and mass. Which brings us to the 5/8, a razor just over ½ the width of the 8/8.

Smaller razors have much greater maneuverability, are much lighter and easier to gauge where they are, what they are doing, and how they are doing it. Smaller razors will have more feedback, which can/will give you a better idea of the sharpness of the blade, the correct (or incorrect) angle you are using to cut with, and so on and so forth. Trimming sideburns and moustaches, or shaving your upper lip is a snap, and stropping/honing is less cumbersome.

5/8ths razors are the most popular and common sized razor, and are typically recommended to beginners.

The important thing is using what you are most comfortable with. 5/8ths or 6/8ths razors are recommended for beginners, and frankly many advanced straight razor users prefer 5/8ths (or smaller) razors. The width of the razor by and large will not affect the quality of the shave, pending the blade is honed to the proper sharpness, and most straight razor users eventually try a few different sizes, and settle on what they are most comfortable with. Personally, I have razors from 10/8 (over 1 inch) to 2/8ths, and I can get superb shaves from them all, but personally I tend to prefer razors around 5/8ths to 6/8ths wide. I liken smaller razors to a sports car and larger razors to a muscle car.

BadgerAndBlade.com

Here are two pictures of an array of different sized blades next to one another so you can gauge the difference. From top to bottom - 8/8, 7/8, 6/8, 5/8, 3/8

Section 2 - 4, Type of Tip/Point...

There are many types of tips/points out there, and most of them boil down to what you find ascetically pleasing. Here are examples of the most common tips/points.

Spike

A spike point has a square like point at the end of the razor, which can be quite helpful for very fine/detailed work, and selecting individual hairs to pop off, but it can also be a nightmare if you aren't paying attention. Spike points are the most likely to cut your face, as many new straight razor shavers, or, for that matter, advanced straight razor shavers (who aren't paying attention, or are tired, etc) as one mistake and the tip just slides right into your cheek. Trust me, it isn't pleasant. On most vintage "spike point" razors, the spike has actually been removed (via rubbing the spike point on a razor hone) by the original owner and for good cause, as they can be tricky. Like all things, they do have their purpose, and many gents are quite fond of spikes. I have quite a few spikes myself, but if I typically prefer the ascetics of other tip/point styles.

Spike

Round

The reason these exist is due to many straight razors troubles with the spike, and round, or rounded pointed/tipped razors are quite common. Round pointed/tipped razors are VERY user friendly to use, and are highly recommended to the beginner.

Round Point

Spanish Point

The Spanish point razor has somewhat of a rounded "tip" yet the end of the blade is ground to form a neat/interesting look to the razor.

Spanish Point

Barber's Notch

The barbers notch also has a bit of a rounded point, however a "notch" is taken out of the front of the blade for maneuverability in hard to reach areas, such as the nostril or ear. By and large for most users however, they will be selected for appearance.

Barber's Notch

French/Irish Point

The French point or Irish point juts out of the front of the blade, in either a straight/triangular fashion, or in a smooth domed fashion. The French point allows the greatest precision around beards, moustaches, etc, as it "juts out" in front of the razor, and ends at a tip, which allows very precise cutting at the tip, and you can easily see around it, and keep track of the tip. French points (when especially elongated) can be more difficult to hone/strop as there is no spine above the front of the razor, so it can sometimes be difficult to keep the tip of an especially elongated French point properly stropped/honed, however for most French points/tips this should not be a major issue.

French/Irish Point

"Ooblong" point or oblique

Ooblong point or oblique

Section 2 - 5, Which part is which?

There are a lot of variations when straight razors are discussed. The variations define the razor in terms of look and performance. Some will have a preference on the tip, grind, size, etc. What does it mean? Here are a few examples to help differentiate those special features.

Tip

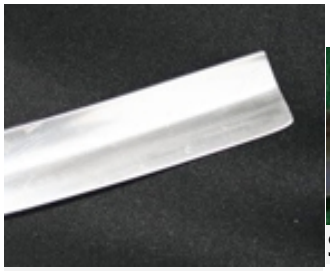
The tip defines the end the blade of a straight razor

Barber Notch

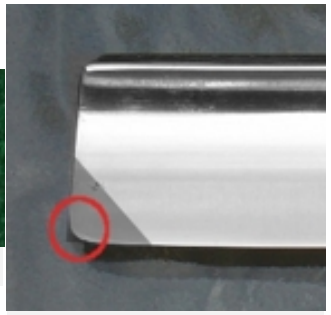
French Point or Irish Point

Round Point

Spanish Point


Square Point

Spike Point


Muted Point

Shoulder

Single Stabilizer

Double Stabilizer

Shoulderless

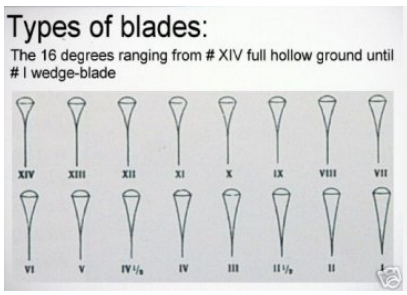
Shoulderless

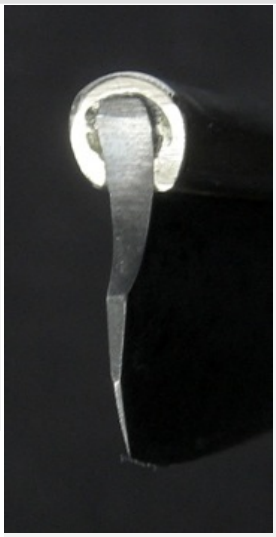
Jimps

Top Jimps

Bottom Jimps

Grind

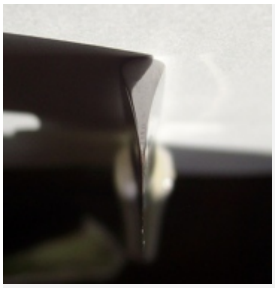


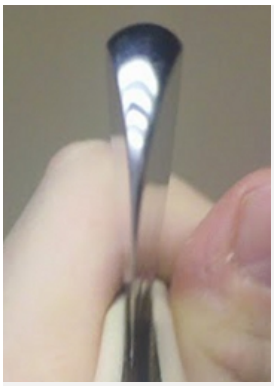

Frameback

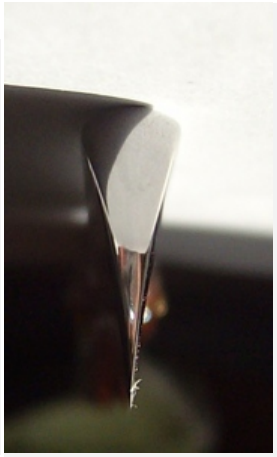
Faux Frameback

Full Hollow

Extra Hollow


Half Hollow


Quarter Hollow


Near Wedge

Other Features

Worked Spine

Thumb Notch

Section 2 - 6, Carbon VS Stainless Steel...

This is an interesting topic. Personally, I've always been quite fond of Stainless Steel razors, however only recently has the online straight razor community embraced them as an equal to the Carbon Steel razor, and just a matter of 3-4 years ago, I was one of the few fellas preaching the effectiveness of stainless steel razors.

So why would you buy a carbon steel razor?

Well, many feel that carbon steel razors shave closer, or rather; you are able to put a finer edge on a carbon steel razor. While I can attest, it is easier to put a finer edge on a carbon steel razor, I wouldn't say they can develop a finer edge, as many stainless razors I own, and have honed have had every bit as superlative an edge as their carbon steel "brothers." Carbon steel razors are more readily available, less expensive, and are offered in a wider array of handle materials. Carbon steel razors also tend to not be as robust as a stainless steel razor, so nearly all "singing" razors are actually carbon steel razors, as they can/will bend and contour to your face easier, as the metal had more spring, or give to it. Lastly, carbon steel razors can/will rust if not properly looked after and cared for--much easier than a stainless steel razor. Now, the care of a carbon steel straight razor isn't overly difficult, complex or time consuming (see the section of the guide on the care of carbon steel razors) so don't write them off as too much effort.

Why a Stainless Steel razor?

Well, first, and most obvious, stainless steel bladed razors "Stain-Less" as the name would imply, so the chance of your prized possession rusting away, showing water spots, oxidation, etc is greatly reduced. For instance, some carbon steel razors like Thiers Issards can show water spots no matter what you do with/to them and no matter how careful you are. Stainless razors also tend to be a little stiffer/more robust when compared to a carbon steel razor of the same grind, so gentlemen with heavier beards tend to enjoy them, and while stainless steel razors take a little longer to hone, their edge typically lasts longer than carbon steel razors.

Overall

I cannot say one razor steel is definitively superior to another, as they both have their pros and cons, however for new straight razor shavers, or straight razor shavers in particularly humid/wet areas, I personally would recommend a stainless steel razor, as it will require less maintenance, and will hold the edge longer, which will allow you to concentrate on what's most important--the shave. Remember if you are a new straight razor shaver, you shouldn't be immediately concerned with the razor taking longer to hone, as you should be purchasing your razor pre-honed, as discussed in What is a shave ready razor?.

Section 2 - 7, Razor Brands The New, the Vintage and the bad!

This page intend to list any straight razor brand that is good or bad. This page should help someone looking to buy a straight razor by knowing which brands to avoid and which brand to buy. This page was created from Joel's Interactive Guide to Straight Razor Shaving and can be discussed in this thread[1].

General Rule

General rule of thumb, Sheffield, German/Solingen and American made vintage razors are good. Modern Thier-Issard, Dovo, Boker are good too.

Dovo vs. Thier-Issard

Most straight razor users would agree with the following rules of thumb for NEW TI's and Dovos...

1. A Thiers Issard will often be much more difficult to hone than a Dovo.
2. A Thiers Issard will typically shave better than a Dovo.
3. A Thiers Issard will hold an edge longer than a Dovo.
4. A low end Dovo will typically shave as well as a high end Dovo, where as this is not the case with TI's.
5. A Dovo will offer the best value, in terms of what you get for the $.
6. Dovos have better gold wash, gold plating, and pinning jobs.

The Good Brands

This list isn't all encompassing, and is in no particular order, however if listed below, and in condition, it should be a superlative shaver. Again, this isn't comprehensive, but it rather a grouping of some of the more common, high quality razors available at flea markets, on eBay and from fellow forum members to look out for.

From the USA

1. Waterville
2. Genco/Geneva Cutlery Co
3. Case (W.R. Case & Sons)
4. Winchester
5. Sta-Sharp
6. Craftsman (There is also a German version that is superlative)
7. Hart Steel

From Germany

1. Dorko
2. Dubl Duck
3. Dovo
4. Bismarck
5. Puma

6. Boker
7. Henckels
8. Imperial
9. Revisor
10. Ralf Aust

From France

1. Thiers Issard (LeGrelot, P. Hospital)
2. Lecoultre

From England

1. Wade & Butcher
2. Wostenholm

From Asia

1. **Gold Dollar** (Not of great quality but with some work can be made shave-ready.)
2. **Titan** (have been making straight razors for the Asian market for over 100 years). Not normally shave ready when new but with normal honing can be made so.

The Bad Brands

Razors to STAY AWAY from.

By and large most very inexpensive razors, or (by and large) razors made in Pakistan, India or China. Some brands to stay away from Zeepk, Double Arrow, etc. If the razor is not stamped with a brand name, avoid it.

On auction and craft sites you will also find many RSOs (Razor Shaped Objects), usually with damascus steel blades and luridly colourful scales. Be advised that these objects are only designed for display, and not intended to be shaved with or honed.

Section 2 - 8, What to look for when buying a second hand straight razor

Straight razor parts

This page was inspired from Joel's Interactive Guide to Straight Razor Shaving.

The question on what to keep an eye for when buying a second hand straight razor is a regular topic. What a straight razor buyer should be aware of when buying that second hand razor on eBay or in an Antique Shop.[1] [2] [3][4]

What to look for

Yet to be restored W&B

There are various bits that can go wrong when buying a straight razor. When buying a straight razor, make sure that you can have a very good look at it and/or get as much pictures as possible. If the pictures are blurry, out of focus or only showing one side of the blade, the sale should not be considered.

Also, be prepared that the final price does not include a shave ready straight razor in most occasions. The scales might need to be repaired or changed. Those must be considered before buying. The more damage, the bigger the restorations, the more expensive it will be.

The Blade and The Edge

The edge is of course the most important part of the straight razor. The edge cannot be replaced, any problems can only be honed out, reducing the width of the straight razor.

Chips

Fig. 7-23.
To display the fault code, turn the ignition on (DO NOT start
the engine) and depress the rocker switch for at least four sec-
onds. The indicator will display the fault code in a series
flashes. For example, two flashes, followed by three flash
followed by four flashes, followed by two flashes indicates
Table r gives a complete list of available
6000 7000 8000 9000 10000

Carefully look at the edge for chips and cracks. Ask for more pictures if you are unsure. Keep in mind, chips will need to be honed out to make a shave ready edge. Cracks leave you at risk of a blade that might break while honing or shaving.

Cracked Blade

Those can be difficult to spot sometimes, but a close attention is always required near the edge and on both sides.

Pitting

Heavy rust and pitting

The edge is one of the most important part of the straight razor as you use it to shave. Make sure the edge does not have any pitting close to it. A razor can be saved if it has pitting most of the time. The Honemeister will need to hone the pitting out to avoid having any chips on the cutting edge.

Also, too much pitting on the blade might indicate a razor stored in poor conditions. The metal might be weaken and might not hold an edge.

Frown

A frown is defined by having a smaller width in the middle of the blade between the edge and the spine(Not smiling). To correct a frown, the Honemeister will need to make the edge flat again and then hone it. Meaning your razor width will be reduced to the smallest width. Most of the time, it can be repaired. If the straight razor is a smiling blade (Smiling up), there are no issues with that type of blade.

Hone wear

Heavy Hone Wear

Hone wear is defined by how much metal was removed by the previous honers to make the edge shave ready. If the edge has too much hone wear, it might be close to the end...

Scales

The scales are easily replaceable in case of a problem. If they are cracked or broken, they could be swapped with another razor that have a similar size blade. This doesn't always work. A new set of scales could always be bought, but there is always a possible incompatibility with the blade. Having a set of scales made is a sure replacement but a more expensive option too.

Holes in the scales

Scales eaten by bugs

If the scales have holes in them, bugs probably had a feast and they might be weakened.[5]

Cracks in the scales

Broken scales

Cracked scales

Depending on whether you are ready to have new scales made for the blade or not, look for any cracks or missing pieces from the scales. Cracked scales should not stop you from buying the razor, as long as you are ready to live with them or replace them. Keep in mind that a cracked pivot will probably result in a loose blade.

Section 2 - 9, Things to look for when selecting a Custom Straight Razor

Preface

I am going to attempt to give you a heads-up on what to look for if you are considering a purchase of a custom razor or already have one and want to decide for yourself if you got your money's worth. Understand this very important point. I am not drawing attention to any other specific maker's

capability, especially with any attempt to embarrass them or attack their character. No maker comes to mind when I address workmanship in this page. I assume no responsibility for anyone else's ability as an artist, which brings me to this personal belief. If you remain a hobbyist, you can get away with a lot of imperfections and still deserve some commensurate praise and a fair price for your work. Once you hang out a shingle and start charging more than a hundred dollars for anything you do, it needs to be good. Not almost good, but really good. If you make something for sale on a semi-regular basis, the razor should not have those so-called "artistic" flaws, and it should be completely void of the amateur ones. I will get into what is good in a minute.

Where and Who?

A lot of the boys on several forums have taken up restoration and have dabbled in making some creations of their own as well. I actually welcome all the new enthusiasts. I look at no one as a competitor because I have a very long waiting list and I sell everything I make - and - I don't need the money. I make nothing I don't want to and I will not make someone else's design. I do have to say that I take some pride in knowing some of you got a start by using the information on my CD to get your feet wet. Some of your projects are really impressing the dickens out of me. I truly enjoy seeing good work and more and more of it is showing up on all the forums.

I have also seen some pretty squint-eyed nose-wrinkling stuff on the forums. I am sometimes baffled that a razor may still get good comments from an overly supportive community that seems to base a razor's quality more on a maker's personality than on the actual razor he puts out. I'm not saying someone's ego should get bruised with a comment like, "Man, that looks like crap." I am saying that if it doesn't really look good to you in a picture, it probably isn't going to look very good when it is in your hands either. Encouragement is good when one of our boys puts up a pic of his new creation and says, "this is something I just whipped up" Laying on a thick blanket of patronize-the-artisan is not good, and the BS certainly won't help them improve if they think everything is hunky-dory when it is not. I have encouraged folks on some threads, and often made suggestions for improvement in a PM. That seems to work pretty well. I would never intentionally try to embarrass anyone's efforts in a public setting.

I think the points I am about to make are something I need to emphasize because this growing excitement over acquiring custom straight razors takes a tiny bit of study before you jump in with both feet. Unless, of course, you have the money to learn that the $300 razor you just bought shaves nice but has a host of quality control issues. A $300 razor should not have any issues, in my opinion.

When a potential customer reads nothing but thick, sometimes undeserved, praise on every single new razor creation on every single forum, amateur or artisan, he has been left without a clue. And, those without a clue don't know it. Still, somehow they acquire the ability to pass on being clueless to the next person when they wind up buying some of the inferior work themselves. All

because they don't know what to look for.

Here is what you need to look for in a custom razor ~ Actually, any expensive razor

Keep in mind that even my $250 razors meet all of the standards below

Very seldom do my razors go above $600 ~ Most are less than $400

- Make sure the master grind (hollow grind) mirrors the opposite side of the blade at the heel. The point of entry of the sanding belt at the heel should be the same on both sides of the blade as you look straight down at the cutting edge.
- Make sure the grind goes to the same place up into the spine on both sides of the blade
- Make sure there are no twists in the blade when viewed from the tip to the heel
- Make sure there are no glaring defects, anywhere
- Make sure the blade does not lean away from the perpendicular plane of the tang and spine as viewed from the tip of the blade towards the tang. You should be able to see the imaginary T shape I am referring to. It should not look like this, *T* . This is a common defect on many vintage razors.
- Make sure the blade does not touch either side of the scales when it is closed. A blade touching the scales is caused by one or more of the following: Bent spine, twist in the blade, blade leaning off of a 90 degree angle from the *T* shape, or warped scales.
- Make sure the spine and tang is in a straight line when viewed from the top all the way from the tip of the blade to the back of the tang.
- Make sure a mirror finish is a mirror finish. You will not be able to see a single scratch mark in a good mirror finish. Otherwise, just call it a shiny finish.
- Make sure the scales are the same thickness. Some allowances can be made for natural horn materials, including antler. Up to a 16th thicker, maybe
- Make sure that both scales have the same footprint and look like bookends when viewed from the top or bottom of the razor.
- Make sure the wedge spacer is actually a wedge. There is an important function to the taper and using something with parallel sides puts too much strain on your scales, especially if there is a third pin incorporated into them. All the razor manufacturers made them for a couple hundred years with a taper for a reason.
- If natural materials like bark ivory is used for scales, find out if it has been stabilized. Putting a coat of CA on them doesn't make them stabilized, although it can definitely help. All ivory does not need stabilization, but the stuff that has started to check and crack is better with it rather than without it. A maker's comment that "it doesn't need it", without giving a reason why, I would find suspect. Deteriorating ivory needs to be impregnated with phenolins/resins under heat and a vacuum

to be effective. Sometimes it may even need to be lined to give stability. Burl woods need the same treatment. A coat of tung oil on woods that are not very strong and dense just won't cut it, for the years you expect to get use out of it, anyway.
- If jimps are used, they need to be equally spaced and cut at the same depth throughout the pattern. It's not hard to do and attention to detail should be expected for the high-end priced razors.
- Make sure the bevel along the cutting edge is pretty close to parallel for the entire length and that the blade is not thicker than .012 at the apex of the cutting edge bevel. I try to keep mine below .010. The exception is wedge-shaped blades.
- Make sure there are no gouges or protrusions on the profile of the blade. Having either of these defects does not make the razor quaint or anoint it as having artistic flair.
- Make sure the end of the blade is not farther than 1/8 inch away from the butt spacer when the blade is closed.

Conclusion

Are some of these requirements strict? You bet they are! As they should be when customers start shelling out huge dollars for custom work. If the razor you pick out can't pass most of these requirements, then it's my opinion that you should not spend the big dollars to get them. The more educated you are about what to look for in a custom razor, the better decisions you will make when you decide to purchase one. Just because something is hand made doesn't mean you should be willing to accept the kind of flaws you would find unacceptable with any another product. I doubt that the really good makers would object to these requirements - they most likely adopted these, and more, long before I said anything. You are entitled to get what you pay for and you should not have to accept "artistic variances" that simply translate to mean excuses for amateurish or handyman work.

Section 3 - Honing how-to's

Section 3 - 1, How to lap/flatten your hone.

In order to get your hone to work, it simply MUST be completely flat. Don't misunderstand, or take this lightly - honing with a hone that is not completely flat will simply waste your time and wear down your hone... and your razor. Without the hone being completely flat, you aren't honing the blade at the proper, and consistent angle, and are actually doing more harm than good, and rounding the edge of the blade. Just because your hone is new, doesn't mean it's flat - do yourself a favor, and ALWAYS flatten a new hone, and flatten it on a regular basis. Every few razors you hone - a quick/easy lap of the hone will flatten it, and will require minimal effort, so lap, and lap often.

It's better to do a quick 3-4 pass lap/flatten every time you hone and be certain you have a perfectly flat working surface, than to lap once in a blue moon, and have to really lap the heck out of your hone.

The object of flattening your hone is to take a perfectly flat, yet abrasive surface (IE: plate glass with abrasive papers, or a DMT Diamond Plate) and rub the hone against it (using no pressure) until the hones surface is as flat as the perfectly flat surface. The methodology is quite simple - the parts of the hone that are above other parts of the hone will be worn away until they touch the most inward, or deepest portion of the hone that is not flat, thus flattening the entire hone.

Note: Not all hones need to be flattened. Incredibly hard Ceramic Hones such as the Spyderco Extra Fine will show almost NO wear after a tremendous amount of use - however ALL water stones need to be flattened, and on a regular basis.

The Necessary Gear

Well, there are numerous ways, and different individuals have different methods of doing so, some choose to use abrasive papers and plate glass, others use special flattening stones, and some use diamond plates. Personally, I find Diamond plates to work significantly better than any other method, and to boot, it is much, MUCH quicker, easier, and mess free to do with Diamond Plates. The particular plate I use, and the one that will be used in this tutorial is a DMT model D8C - which I choose both for it's size (it is large enough to accommodate all of my hones) and it's effectiveness with ANY grit of hone, and a hone made of any material. Don't pay any attention, or worry about the D8C plate being too coarse to use on a high grit, superfine hone, as the DMT will leave no scratches in your hones, nor will it leave any coarse abrasive compound in your hones. This process can be used whether you are using abrasive papers, flattening stones, etc.

D8C Packaging

How to lap/flatten your hone

DMT D8C plate mounted to a universal (rubber) hone mount (The hone mount isn't necessary, as the diamond plates come with 4 small rubber numbs you can put on them so they don't slide around, but the universal hone mounts are inexpensive, and make the process easier)...

How to lap/flatten your hone

In this example, I am going to flatten the most versatile, common and widely used straight razor hone - the Norton 4K/8K, as that is what most of you will be lapping as well.

Here is the DMT D8C mounted to the universal rubber hone mount, with a Norton 4/8K on top of it to show the size of the DMT VS the Norton for reference...

How to lap/flatten your hone

Now, how do I lap/flatten my hone with the above gear?

Step 1

Soak your Norton 4/8K for about 15 minutes or so, as if you were going to use it to hone a razor, and while the hone soaks, put your DMT Diamond Plate on a stable surface that you don't mind getting wet - and locate a pencil.

How to lap/flatten your hone

Step 2

After the hone has soaked for about 15 minutes, take the hone out of the water, and use your pencil to draw on the hone - checkerboard pattern, back and forth, diagonal - whatever pattern you use or prefer, it doesn't matter - so long as the pattern covers a large portion of the hone and is on all of the edges/corners. In this example, I am drawing on the white, 4K side of the 4K/8K. (Note: if you are using a 2-sided hone, you have to lap/flatten BOTH sides using the same process)

How to lap/flatten your hone

Step 3

Put water on the DMT D8C plate, and place the hone on the D8C plate with the pencil drawing side of the hone, face down on the diamond plate.
How to lap/flatten your hone

Step 4

Move the Norton back and forth across the diamond plate (circular motions as well will work, or a combination of the two) while being careful not to add ANY pressure to the hone - let the diamond plate to the work. In a short period of time, you'll start to see the water turn milky white (based on the color of the hone, the color can/will be different, so for the 8K side of the Norton, it would be a yellowish milk) which is showing you the Diamond Plate is doing its job, and leveling the Norton by removing the areas of the hone touching the plate.
How to lap/flatten your hone

Step 5

This is where the silly pencil markings come in. Periodically pick up the Norton off of the Diamond Plate and check the pencil markings to see if, and where they exist. The object of the exercise is to continue to lap the Norton against the diamond plate until there are no more pencil markings left. As you can see below - SOME of the pencil markings were lapped right off, where as others were more stubborn and took a bit to become lapped out. This means my hone was NOT flat, as if it were, the pencil marks would quickly, easily and uniformly disappear. Once all of the pencil marks are gone, it means the hone is perfectly flat, as ALL portions of the hone are now touching the lapping plate - and the lapping plate is flat!

Pick up the hone, you should see a milky residue left from the hone on the plate...

Notice in the picture below where the pencil markings are? This means the part of the hone with pencil markings is not touching the lapping plate, thus the parts of the hone that have NO pencil markings on them must be worn down to the point where the parts of the hone with pencil markings are touching the perfectly flat lapping plate - thus making the hone perfectly flat...

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Again, remember to flatten your hones often! A flat hone is a useful hone.

Section 3 - 2, Creating the initial bevel....

Creating the initial bevel means to a certain extent doing 2 things. First, if the razor for some reason doesn't have a completely flat/even edge and/or spine, in this stage this will be resolved and the spine/blade angle will become consistent and flat. Secondly in this stage you are creating the initial/consistent edge, which should usually result in the ability to pop hairs off of your arm right off of the 4K side of the Norton. Now, the 4K is not the only hone that can/will set the initial bevel, and in fact for some problematic razors, or razors that are pretty beat up, you would ideally want a coarser grit in order to remove metal faster/easier and create the initial bevel quicker. In this example the Norton is used as an example. The same general idea/principle can be applied across a myriad of hones. The Norton is being used in this example due to how common it is, and the fact that most will rarely have to go to a lower grit than 4K in order to establish a bevel/consistent edge.

A quick disclaimer before we start: honing is NOT a straightforward topic. In fact if anything it's an exceptionally vague and personalized process. Nearly every fella that's been honing razors for more than a year has a slightly different way of doing it, and almost EVERY razor is going to be different, as even 2 new razors, the exact same model and the exact same brand can be radically different to hone, as one might be just about ready out of the box, and the other could require a fair amount of work. This is by no means a "one size fits all" method of honing, and to a certain extent is a touch vague, and it is so on purpose. This tutorial should give you the basic principles and tools, but the final product will be primarily trial and error on your part. In this tutorial, I am approaching this razor as if it was an average new razor straight from the factory, so this isn't a razor that needs a lot of work. If you have troubles or are finding yourself spending more than 10-15 minutes on this stage, immediately stop, and post what you are doing, the problems you are having, the type of razor, and any other helpful information regarding your equipment and problems in the honing section/forum here at B&B and we'll help you out! One more note: I can't say enough how important it is to make sure your hone has been lapped and is completely flat.

How to create the initial bevel with the 4K side of a Norton

Step 1

Soak your Norton stone

Step 2

Pull your stone out of the water and hold it with the white (4000 grit) side facing up.

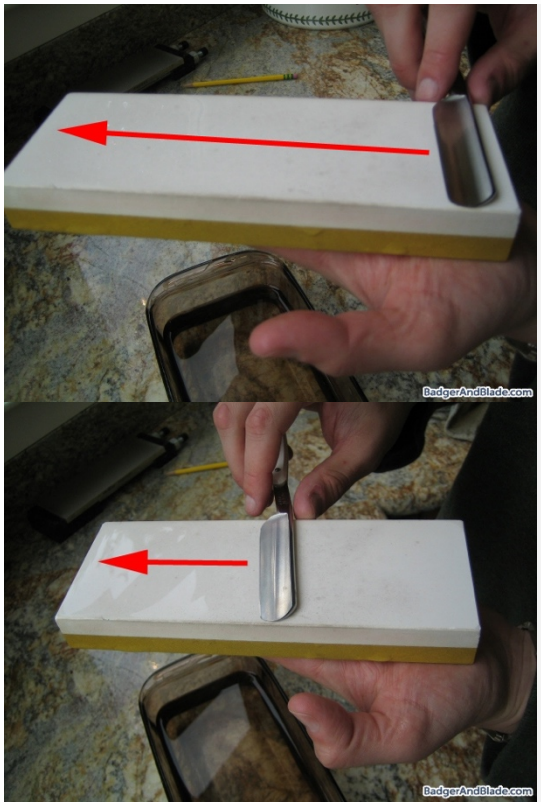
Step 3

Carefully lay the spine of the razor on the hone (keeping the blade off of the hone), and slowly lower the blade flat onto the hone adding NO pressure...

Step 4

Using NO pressure, slide the razor straight across the hone. Some lead with the heel out of habit, however this is not necessary on the Norton due to its size. Again, use NO pressure, let the hone do the work. Keep the razors spine and blade completely flat against the hone during the entire forward motion - again keep in mind, no downward pressure and keep the motion as steady as possible. This motion does not need to be quick, and can actually be quite slow, the object of the exercise is as flat and steady as possible -- speed wholly unimportant. (Note: in some cases is the Norton is your only stone, you

can/should use pressure, however in this example, we are assuming the razor is in pretty good shape, and it is a factory fresh, new razor).



Step 5

As you reach the end of the hone, do NOT just pick the razor up, as at all times you want the spine of the razor on the hone. The correct way to prepare for the second half of the first complete "pass" or "stroke" is to roll the razor, picking the edge of the razor off of the hone, and turning the razor around in the opposite direction. This is important, as if you roll the razor in the opposite manner, it will push the blade into the hone, thus being counterproductive and rolling the cutting edge of the razor, and significantly dulling the razors edge...

Step 6

With the razor now facing the opposite direction (towards you) slide the blade in the same fashion as above, towards you.

Step 7

Roll the razor as you had done in Step 5 - roll the razor, picking the edge of the razor off of the hone, and turning the razor around in the opposite direction.

Step 8

Repeat this process about 4 more times, for a total of 5 front AND back strokes.

Step 9

Typically this is about all that is needed for a new razor--5 front and back strokes on the 4K side of a Norton, HOWEVER it is not uncommon at all to need more. If the razors spine and blade feel completely flat on the hone, this should be all that is needed. The best way to tell if the razor is properly honed at this stage unfortunately is to move onto the next stage--polishing/establishing the initial shaving sharp edge, and testing the shaving sharp edge. Personally, I try to shave a little bit of hair on my arm, or

back of my hand and based on how easy, or difficult it is to pop the hairs off, I can gauge how much more time on the 4K the edge needed. Sometimes I end up over honing on this stage, which means the microscopic "fin" I had created with the hone had broken off, or folded and I have to back hone. Back honing is quite simple - it is basically doing the opposite motion on the hone, so you are dragging the razor spine first on the hone, but remember you still want to roll the razor on the spine, NOT the edge to switch directions. Again, this is where honing can become difficult/tricky -- and it takes experience to know when a razor is ready to move onto the next stage, or when you have over honed, so make sure to ask questions on the forum in the honing section, but armed with the above, you'll be able to take experienced members advice/suggestions and put them to good use!

Step 10

Rinse off the razor with running water (be careful not to hit the faucet with the edge you just honed!) so as to remove any grit/residue the 4K side of the Norton may have left on the razor...

Step 11

If you happen to be stopping at this stage for any reason (due to time constraints, or you happen to run into a problem and need/want to ask questions on the forum) make SURE to carefully wipe ALL of the water off of the blade with a towel/cloth as shown below. Do not touch the cutting edge with the cloth directly - instead to make sure it is dry, do a very light "stropping" on the towel...

Section 3 - 3, Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge
Firstly, make sure if you've been honing on the 4K side of the Norton, or another hone, to wash the blade off prior moving onto the next step using the yellow, 8K side of the Norton.

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

With the 8K (yellow) side of the Norton, use same technique as described in Creating the initial bevel section and slide the razor across the hone back and forth (making sure to switch directions by rolling the edge off of the hone and back around the to opposite direction). The object of this part of the honing process is to remove the more aggressive/rougher scratch pattern left by the 4K side of the hone, and replace it with a lighter, smoother/tighter scratch pattern of the 8K side of the Norton.

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

Usually anywhere around 10-15 strokes (in both directions) is sufficient for removing all of the scratch marks from the 4K, and polishing the edge to a much finer, smoother pattern. Again, sometimes you might need more or less depending on the method, razor etc. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions on the forum. We'll gladly help!

Now make sure to wash off the razor again with running water, as whether you're going to shave with the edge right off of the 8K, or move on to a finer finishing stone. You don't want any residue from the 8K making your job more difficult as you move on to your leather strop or finer finishing hone. If you are going to shave with the razor right off of the 8K side of the Norton make SURE to carefully wipe ALL of the water off of the blade with a towel/cloth as shown below. Do not touch the cutting edge with the cloth directly - instead to make sure it is dry, do a very light "stropping" on the towel...

Section 3 - 4, Finishing via Hones...

Using a hone, is the most traditional manner of finishing a razor, and as a tribute to tradition, in this example I will use a natural Escher hone, with a slurry stone, however it's the same general idea/process for most finishing stones, and is identical to the process of finishing a razor with a Belgian Yellow Coticule, or a Thuringian hone.

Step 1

Wet the hone.

Image Interactive_Guide_Straight_Razor_96.jpg

Step 2

Create a slurry on the stone. To create a slurry, take the slurry stone and using just a slight amount of pressure, rub the slurry stone back and forth across the entire hone. Some prefer to rub the slurry stone against the hone in circular motions, which works great as well, just try to do so evenly across the hone, so as to not create unequal wear in a specific area of the hone, as over time it can have a deleterious impact on the hones flatness.

Once you see a hazy slurry (see circle) you're ready to go to step 3! (Note: this should only take a few seconds)

Grab your razor and get ready to hone.

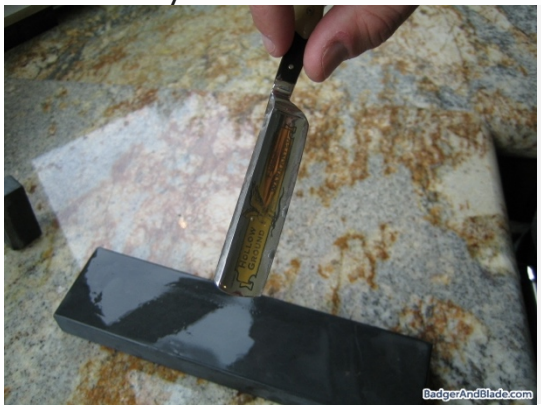
Step 3

Honing with most finishing stones is going to be just a little different than previously described (Creating the initial bevel & Polishing and Establishing the Shaving Sharp Edge) as most finishing hones are going to be narrower than a 3" wide Norton stone, so an "X" pattern will need to be used. For the "X" patter, you ideally want as much of the razor on the hone as possible throughout the stroke -- so place the razor on the hone as described in previous sections by carefully laying the spine of

the razor on the hone (keeping the blade off of the hone). Now, slowly lower the blade flat onto the hone however this time, you are going to lay the razor on the hone with the heel leading, so the razor is NOT straight across the hone as this will allow greater blade to hone contact, and will also be more stable, and easier to keep the razor/spine totally flat against the hone the entire stroke. Obviously, you could not just slide the razor straight across, as that would not sharpen the whole blade, so this is where the "X" pattern comes into play. By sliding the razor across the hone in a diagonal manner (see picture below) the entire blade will be sharpened, and when you roll the razor, picking the edge of the razor off of the hone, and turning the razor around in the opposite direction and perform a DIAGONAL stroke in the opposite direction, you have just made an elongated "X" across the hone as the two strokes (one in each direction) combined look like an "X". Do about 10-15 strokes (in each direction) with absolutely no pressure (at this stage, you want to be as delicate as possible to get the finest edge) which should leave a very polished edge.

Step 4

Take the razor off of the hone, and wash it off with running water, as it will have slurry residue on it.



Step 5

VERY carefully wipe ALL of the water off of the blade with a towel/cloth as shown below. Do not touch the cutting edge with the cloth directly - instead to make sure it is dry, do a very light "stropping" on the towel...

Now, you're ready to strop your razor up, and enjoy a shave!

Section 3 - 5, Finishing via abrasive pasted strop....

Finishing a razor using a paddle strop is probably the quickest and easiest method of finishing a straight razor and preparing an incredibly fine/polished edge. You can use a pasted hanging strop or a pasted paddle strop, however, a pasted paddle strop is MUCH better than a hanging strop for this purpose as it will be more consistently flat and have no give. In this example, I am using a four sided paddle strop, but the method is the same for all pasted strops.

Preparation

After you've finished honing the razor on your hone(s), before touching the razor to the strop, be sure to first thoroughly wash and dry the blade. You do NOT want water on your leather strop. Nor do you want the water mixing with your abrasive paste on the strop, making a mess. Once your razor is dry, you're ready to continue.

What micron? Well, this depends. If you didn't do such a hot job honing (or you are refreshing a tired edge), you'll want to start with a more aggressive paste, such as a 3 micron diamond paste. If you did a pretty decent job honing, start with 1 micron, and if you did a stellar/good job honing start with .5 micron diamond paste.

Finishing

Step 1

Place the razor on the strop, touching the spine of the razor to the strop first, then lightly rolling the spine so that the edge and spine now lay flat on the strop. Since you are stropping, NOT honing, you are going to lead with the spine instead of the edge (as if you were back-honing). If you were to lead with the blade, you would cut your strop and damage the edge of the razor--meaning you'd have to go back to setting the initial bevel/edge. Since most pasted strops are not as wide as the razors blade, you'll have to use the "X" pattern.

Step 2

Using NO pressure, leading with the spine, and keeping the razors spine and blade as flat as possible, slide the razor across the strop in a diagonal manner (see picture below) to polish the entire length of the blade.

Step 3

Roll the razor, picking the edge of the razor off of the strop, and turning the razor around in the opposite direction.

Step 4

Perform a DIAGONAL stroke in the same manner as in step 2, yet in the opposite direction. You have just made an elongated "X" across the strop as the two strokes (one in each direction) combined to look like an "X." Step 2 and 4 combined are considered 1 complete stroke or pass. Do approximately 30 passes/strokes (both directions).

Step 5

When you are done with a grit/paste, you must thoroughly wipe off the spine/blade with a dry paper towel to remove any paste or metal residue prior to moving onto another paste/grit or your plain/un-pasted strop. You will sometimes be able to see residue come off of the blade onto the paper towel (see picture below). You do NOT want this contaminate your plain (un-pasted strop) or a different grit/micron paste. If you get 3 micron paste on your 1 micron side, you'll have the two grits mixed greatly reducing your ability to create an increasingly finer edge at each drop/reduction in grit.

With a paper towel in hand, use your thumb and forefinger to grip the spine of the razor and slide the paper towel down the spine to remove any residue from the pasted strop.

If you can see residue come off of the spine onto the paper towel, wipe it off again (left) until you cannot see residue coming off of the blade onto the paper towel.

Next, lightly strop the razors edge (both sides) several times on a clean portion of the paper towel to remove any paste/residue from the blade/edge of the razor.

Now you're ready to move onto a finer grit, or onto a plain/untreated strop!

Section 3 - 6, Sharpness Tests Vs. Edge Uniformity Tests - Bevel Creation Guide

I decided to make this page to teach people how I assess the edge quality at the most important step in the honing process, the bevel creation stage. If you learn to use these tests well and together, then I am confident that the quality of your edges will improve, and it will take you a lot less time and experimentation/guessing to get a great shaving razor. As far as I am concerned there are only two main types of tests: edge thickness (sharpness) test and edge uniformity tests. Both are equally important and have their own strengths; however, both have their weaknesses as well. Therefore, they must be used together to produce the highest quality and most consistent edges in the least amount of time.

Edge Thickness (Sharpness) Tests

These are the tests that you probably hear a lot about: the thumbnail test (TNT), thumbpad test (TPT), and of course the famous hanging hair test (HHT) and its many variations (arm hair, badger hair, etc.). I am not going to go into detail on how to perform these tests because there are already many great threads from experienced members explaining how to perform these (at least over at the SRP), just use the search function and you will get as much information as you could ever want. I will give you a summary of how to perform each of the tests and then explain their strengths and limitations

individually and as a whole (which are addressed with the edge uniformity tests).

The thumbnail test is performed by dragging the edge of the razor (from heal to toe) along your wet thumbnail. The feeling that you want is for the razor to have a smooth and even bite indicating that the bevel is sharp enough to cut into your nail. If the edge glides across your thumb nail easily without resistance then it means that the edge is too dull to bite into the nail and will need more work to get sharp. If you feel the edge bite in but it feels "rough" in certain areas then this indicates that there is roughness such as microchiping or overhoning in that portion of the edge that will need to be worked out before moving on to the polishing grits. Do not perform this test past the 4K stage because the edge will be damaged.

I perform the TPT by lightly pressing and dragging my wet thumb along (not across) a small portion of the edge. The feeling that I am looking for is a smooth sticky feeling caused by the edge slicing into my skin. I then lift my thumb off that portion of the edge and check the next portion in the same way going all the way from the heal to the toe. You will likely find that some areas are sharp and some others are not, indicating that blade will require more work to get uniform sharpness from heal to toe.

There are several different variations of the HHT. The standard test is to hold a hanging hair between your thumb and index finger and then bring it to your razors edge. The hair should be easily and cleanly cut in two pieces (not peeled down the center). The HHT should be performed along the entire blade from heal to toe in order to make sure that the entire edge is sharp. Another variation of the test (which I do not like as much) is to bring the edge across your arm hair and assess how easily it pops the hairs. In my opinion the major shortcoming of this test is the fact that it will not tell you which portions of the blade are actually very sharp and which are not because hairs will be popping all over; it gives you more of an idea of the average level of sharpness of your entire edge. If you are a perfectionist like me you will want the entire edge to be at its optimal level of sharpness. Another variation of this test is to pick one particular hair on your arm, and attempt to cut it with a particular portion of the edge. Different hairs can sometimes react somewhat differently in the HHT, and the general rule is the thinner the hair the sharper your edge will need to be to cut it cleanly.

Strengths

All of these tests are fundamentally testing the same thing: the thickness of the edge (not width of the bevel) which is more or less the same as the sharpness. Many people say that the only real test is the shave test; however, I have NEVER had a great shaving razor that did not at least pass these sharpness tests very well. In fact I would go so far as to say that passing these tests well is a pre-condition to having a high quality edge; if your razor will not pass the sharpness tests and you think that you are getting good shaves then all I can say is that you don't know what you are missing because you are

getting a great shave in spite of the edge; not because of it. Take the time effort to learn what these tests should feel like and correlate the results to your shaves and the quality and consistency of your edges will improve and it will take you a lot less test shaving to get there. If you can run your thumb along the edge without it cutting in, run the edge across a wet thumbnail with no drag, and/or the blade will not pop hairs suspended above your skin then I can guarantee that your blade is not sharp enough at this point and that you have at least a fair amount of work left to do on the 4K (or other bevel creation stone) if you want to finish with a quality edge.

Limitations

These tests are more subjective than the Edge Uniformity Tests which I will explain in the next section; however there is definitely a proper way to perform the tests and a right and wrong way to interpret the results. The tests are not a pass fail thing, sharpness is more of a continuum or scale. What one person may perceive as a very sharp edge, another who is more experienced may perceive the same edge as dull based on the results and their experience using the tests. Personally, I think that I can get a lot more information about the thickness/sharpness of an edge by the results of the TPT or HHT than I can from the TNT; furthermore I think that there is a higher possibility for damaging an edge with a thumbnail so I stick with the thumbpad and HHT. It takes time and experimenting to interpret the information that these tests give, and someone with more experience will definitely be able to use these more effectively than someone just starting out; however, this does not mean that these tests should be ignored.

The main limitation with the sharpness tests is that they cannot detect a double bevel in the edge or even the places where the stone is not contacting the edge if that portion of the blade was already sharp (at a steeper angle); the edge uniformity tests are needed to detect this. In my experience, the most common times when this common problem shows up are when you are honing a factory sharpened razor for the first time, and when you establish a bevel with tape on the razor to protect the spine from the dreaded hone wear during the early stages and then try to finish honing the razor with the tape off the spine. Basically the problem of double bevels arise whenever a sharp bevel was set at one angle (steeper) and you are trying to hone the razor at another angle (shallower) When you perform the sharpness tests on the razors they will appear sharp as indicated by the sharpness tests, and they are indeed sharp at the 4K level. The problem is that when you try to improve the razor with the higher grit stones you will be doing absolutely nothing to the edge of the edge. The angle that the bevel and edge is set at is at one steeper angle (caused by the factory sharpening the razor with the spine lifted to avoid selling a razor with hone wear, or you setting the bevel on a razor with tape to protect the spine and then removing it for further polishing), and you are honing the razor at a shallower angle because the spine is now on the stone and only the back of the bevel is in contact with the stones. This means that the rough but fairly sharp factory edge or 4K edge will remain regardless of the amount of touch-ups or fine tuning that you do with the finishing stones

because the edge that you are actually shaving with has never been in contact with the higher polishing grits. The razor will shave the same and you are absolutely wasting your time until you establish a uniform bevel. At this point I hope that you are asking yourself, How do I know when I have established a single uniform bevel? Great question! The answer is that you assess this by using the Edge Uniformity Tests which are explained in the next section.

Edge Uniformity Tests

The edge uniformity tests are just as important as the edge sharpness tests because they address the important issues that the sharpness tests do not; however, they are unfortunately overlooked many times leaving people with sup-par edges that will not get any better (or worse) with any touch ups or fine tuning. There are only a few edge uniformity tests that I am aware of, and I have found that the easiest and most effective are the permanent marker test and the microscope test. The microscope can also be used to assess other problems such as micro-chipping and overhoned edges; however, it is not really talked about much in terms of assessing edge uniformity as I am going to explain now. The permanent marker test is a very easy test to perform and interpret; it is a pass fail thing. All that I do is mark the edge of the bevel with dots that go to the very edge of the edge all the way from heal to toe (yes you can use a line too if you want). Then when you hone the razor the marker should be completely removed with a few passes indicating that bevel is completely uniform and the stone is contacting it everywhere and all the way to the edge. If your razor passes this test and also passed the sharpness tests very well then you can be confident that you are ready to move on to the polishing stages, and you will have a razor that shaves great when you are done. On the other hand, it is very likely that the dots will not be completely removed, and you will know that your edge is not uniform and will not be sharpened any further with the higher grit stones. If the dots or line is removed toward the back of the bevel but marker remains at the edge of the edge then you have the very common and significant problem of a double bevel. You must hone on the 4K (or courser stone) until the marker is completely removed all the way to the very edge so that you know that the double bevel is removed. This will allow the fine stones to work their magic on the cutting edge and give you a very sharp, smooth, and great shaving edge.

You can also perform a very similar test with the microscope as I learned from Mr. Randy Tuttle. You will be able to see a double bevel in your edge if the edge is two different colors and has two different scratch patterns. The difference is because the light will reflect differently because of the slight difference in the angle, and the scratch pattern will be different because it will not be from the stone that you are currently working on, it is from the stone that set the first bevel angle. When you are done removing the double bevel, the bevel should only be one color (black) and should have only one scratch pattern from the stone that you are currently using that extends all the way to the very edge. You can also use these two edge uniformity tests together to ensure the best results.

Strengths

These tests allow you to see if the entire edge is contacting the hone, or if you have issues such as a double bevel that need to be worked out. If you attempt to use finishing stones when the edge of the edge is not contacting the hone as in the case of a double bevel then you will be doing nothing but wasting your time because the edge of the razor won't see them. If you only have one even bevel then at least you know that the stone is working on the most important part of the bevel; the edge.

Limitations

You cannot see the bevel thickness or sharpness with a microscope or the magic marker test, all you can see is how the side of the bevel is contacting the hone. You could have the prettiest, shiniest, and most even side of the bevel; however, that absolutely does not mean that the edge is sharp. You must use the sharpness tests to determine if the bevel actually meets at an edge.

Conclusion

I hope that after reading this short guide you have a better understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the two main types of tests and how to use them to assess the edge of a razor, especially during the very important bevel creation stage. The TPT, TNT, and HHT will tell you if your bevel is sharp but not uniform, and the marker test and/or the microscope will let you see if you have an edge that is contacting the stone uniformly and hopefully all the way to the edge, but it will not tell you the thickness/sharpness of the bevel. Both tests have their strengths and weaknesses, so the results are best when they are used together. Unfortunately we cannot see everything that is happening at the microscopic level of our razors edge; however, by using these various tests together we can give ourselves a very good idea of what is going on at the edge level. After a quality bevel as indicated by the tests is both sharp AND even then you just need to polish it carefully with your method of choice, strop it up, shave, and then fine tune it a little if you feel that it is necessary. If you like to use Belgian stones then I have found that using 50-100 passes on both the blue and yellow produces consistently superior results, as does a few light pyramids on the Norton 4K/8K (or even just a few passes on the 8K). Hopefully these tests can take some of the guess work out of the honing process for you, because whiskers only grow so fast.

Section 4 - Different hones explained

Section 4 - 1, What do you need and what's recommended?

This is the first question that you should ask and it really depends on the individual. You need to ask yourself the following:

- What's your budget?
- Are you going to be restoring a lot of razors, or are you looking for a basic setup for maintaining a few straight razors for personal use?
- Do you want the best of the best?
- Do you prefer natural products for a more traditional approach?
- Do you prefer high tech abrasives?

While there is no fail safe hone combination to/for every new (or experienced) straight razor shaver, the basic principle is the same: varying grits of abrasion to establish, then polish (to a microscopic mirror finish) in stages. What this means, is you should have at least a means of establishing an initial bevel, or edge on a razor. Now, even if you only plan on having one straight razor your entire life, and further are going to purchase it pre-honed or send it off to be professionally honed, you still need/want a hone capable of establishing an initial bevel/edge. Why? Simple! If you happened to inadvertently tap the cutting edge of your razor onto the faucet (or any other hard object), drop your razor, your kids get a hold of it and use it to cut a bunch of paper, or whatever the event may be, you'll still have to shave--and ideally with your new best friend and prized possession--your straight razor. Trying to establish the edge when you only have say a finishing hone isn't practical, as (depending on the stone, if it is even possible) it could literally take 5+ hours of honing to get a shaving sharp edge or remove a nick from the edge, or it could days, when with the right array of hones, it may only take a matter of minutes, or up to an hour. Having a reasonable array of grits available is not just handy, but essential.

So, at the VERY least, what do you need? At the very least, you're going to need something around 4000 grit to establish an initial bevel/edge, and 8000 grit to polish the microscopic scratch marks away, left from the 4000 grit. For knives, and most purposes, 4000 grit is considered pretty fine, so with straight razors, we are dealing with incredibly fine grits. The Norton 4000/8000 combination stone is the most widely used, and recommended straight razor hone, as it can both establish an edge and polish the edge to a point which provides a comfortable shave. This is about the bare minimum but it doesn't mean it will be the only option. You could, for instance, instead get a 4000 grit Blue Belgian hone, and a 8000 grit yellow Belgian hone (also known as Belgian Coticules) or medium and fine Spyderco Hones, and so on and so

forth--there are a lot of options. Due to its size, price and the quality, for most the Norton 4/8K is the hone of choice.

How to select what I need?

The easiest way to find what you like without buying any stones is to have the straight razor honed by a Honemeister. Try a few Honmeisters, chances are, not two of them will hone with the same set of stones. If you like the finish of the razor, ask what was used in order to know if you like a natural or artificial hone.

Recommended?

This gets a little trickier, as it really depends on your budget, options available to you at the time of purchase, etc. A place to start would be to get a Norton 4/8K, then another "finishing hone." Basically a finishing hone is a hone that will further polish the edge after having been honed on the 8K side of the Norton, which will provide an even finer, more polished, and sharper edge, which equates to a closer, more comfortable shave. What complicates matters with finishing hones however, is they tend to be quite personalized. Some love an abrasive pasted paddle strop, others a Belgian Yellow Coticule, and so on and so forth. If you are looking at a pasted paddle strop, a 4 sided paddle strop, with abrasive diamond pastes in 3 micron, 1 micron, .5 micron, and .25 micron would be ideal. It gives you even MORE options (grit wise) and is the least expensive option. Diamond pasted strops are much easier to use than a hone, and even inexperienced straight razor users get superlative results with diamond pasted paddle strops.

Think of it like this.... Let's say you want to replicate a $66 4 sided pasted strop with 3 micron, 1 micron, .5 micron, .25 micron diamond pastes with Shapton hones....

Using the least expensive route, here's what you'd need....

- $50 4000 Grit (3.68 Micron) Shapton Glass Stone
- $100 16,000 Grit (.92 Micron) Shapton Glass Stone
- $280 30,000 Girt (.48 Micron) Shapton Glass Stone

You're up to $430, and guess what? You still won't have as micro-fine an edge as you would with the $66 Paddle, as the .25 micron diamond paste equates to basically a 60,000 grit hone!

An alternate summary

Note: This is a cut'n'paste of Gamma's excellent post (see footnote-2)

I think most people who work whatever system they choose will be able to find their happy place with it.
A lot of the honage broohaha, IMO, has to do with the grass seeming greener on the other side of the fence.

Also my opinion, I believe that many people give up on this/that stone/system because they interface better with one or another better.
I personally enjoy edges from a few different systems, Cotis, Thuris, Jnats, etc. I usually use Jnats because, most of the time, I prefer working with their idiosyncrasies more than I do with other hones.

For stones -

Thuringian

I firmly believe that a Thuri is the stupid-easiest hone to use and they'll keep edges going indefinitely, barring accidents. Shaveability off them is wonderful. Keen and smooth - lovely edges come off Thuris.

Coticule

Cotis are great - love them. Takes more learning than a Thuri but has more honing latitude. They work wonderfully, once you learn them. Shaveability here is also great - Thuris might hold an edge over the Coti edge for me quite often, but it's stone dependent - my Les Lat hybrids kick serious Thuri butt. Regardless - I've not had a Coti I can't shave well off of.

Japanese Natural

Jnats can cost more, or not. Depends on the stone, hype from the Magi selling it, the buzz from the flavor of the month crowd, and who put what stamp on it. Jnats are my favorite type of stone, but they're not the only hones I use. Not every Jnat serves the purpose of touching up or finishing as well as another one - so there's that to deal with. A lot of what is/is not a finisher is subjective though. Learning Jnats can be somewhat involved - and a fair bit of testing might be called for. For me - the best edges come off the more difficult-to-use stones. I think edges off soft stones are, generally, very Coti like so I'll use a Coti for that type of thing. I've found that the stupid-sharp edges are only really possible on the hardest stones. I've had very little issue using hones that hard, but not everyone feels the same way. Even so, if all else is equal, I'd choose/recommend a harder stone over a softer one 99.99% of the time. (Edit - hardness is not the only factor here, just because the stone is hard does not mean it's a winner. There's too much to get into on this topic here - so I just referenced things loosely. There are plenty of very hard stones that are, essentially - useless - out there, so before shifting into LV 5+++ mode, it's best to check the lay of the land first.)

Arkansas

Arks - killer hones. Slow - not too expensive, take some work to condition just right. Easy enough to use. The best ones for finishing do not have the latitude the previous choices might have. At the same time - a properly edged razor off an Ark is a brilliant shaving tool and, IMO, (nearly) impossible to equal or beat.

Welsh Slate

Welsh slates - cheap options, the purple one was the best of the lot for me.

Naniwa and other synthetics

Naniwa 12k (or similar) - takes a bit of mastering but it'll do fine as a touch up hone. Limited in scope, not too pricey, and probably best used in conjunction with an 8k before it. I plan on gluing an 8k to a 12k at some point, then I'll cut it down to size and I'll have a nice modern two sided b-hone that can do, basically, anything I need a hone like that to do. Shavability off the 12k, when done correctly, is good. I'm not a synth finishing kind of guy most of the time, but the fact is that I can shave pretty well off that stone when the ground work was done correctly and the finish was applied correctly.

Barber Hone

Barber hones - a Frictionite 00 will do the trick, and a few others also - but they're way too expensive IMO. A reg b-hone might suit ones tastes too, but there's a good bit ot trial/error and effort in this option.

Pasted Strop

Truthfully - a Cromox pasted strop will cost about 10 bucks and it'll keep an edge going a reeeeeaaaaalllly long time. I started there. Kept me going while learning and using that approach helped me learn a lot about honing and edges. Personally - I prefer the white TI paste over the Chromox, costs a few dollars more. Someone sent me a sample of the black Dovo paste and while it's good I think I prefer the white TI stuff but it's pretty good and also better than Chromox for me.

Summary

Someone could test a few edges from a few different people to see what they like or don't like. The main issue I have with that is that there is no guarantee that you will ever get the same edge of of xyz stone that someone else did.

See - I've tried some Jnat edges, and if I thought those razors were truly representative of that Jnats could do - I might not be interested. With hones - I find that it is mostly about what the owner/user of the hone can do with it. Coti edges run the gamut, mellow to brisk and sharp as hell. Same for Jnats. Thuris are more consistent but the user's talents still weigh in heavily. If someone wants to hone, I think the only way to know what's what is by trying different stones. The good news is that there's little risk - most hones sell for about what they cost so there's usually not too much investment-loss. I see it the same way as renting a lens before I buy it - costs a few bucks but at least I get to see what it'll do first hand. Each Coti/Thuri/Jnat/etc is going to be a little different, but I still see the process being very similar.

Pick one, buy it, use it, learn how to use it better each time you use it. You'll probably surprise yourself after a few go-arounds. There is nothing like having one, and only one, hone to help someone learn how to hone with that one hone proficiently.

Section 4 - 2, What does a slurry stone do and what are they?

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

Image Interactive_Guide_Straight_Razor_117.jpg

A slurry stone is a stone with which you rub on your hone to create "slurry" or a milky liquid on the top of your hone, which helps some hones cut more effectively. These stones are typically referred to as "slurry stones" for European stones, and as "Nagura Stones" for Japanese stones, and they are actually different. A slurry stone is a stone made from the same material of

the hone, in the same grit, and will look identical to the hone--basically a small little block of hone. By rubbing the slurry stone on the hone--the two identical materials abrade one another and create a milky abrasive liquid, and lift the cutting agents from the hone and the slurry stone. On the other hand, Japanese Nagura stones are actually a different grit, and for that matter a different material all together. Nagura stones are typically white (but come in varying colors and grades) and their purpose is to usually make the hone cut finer/create a finer polish on the edge, however in some rare instances Nagura stones will make the hone more abrasive.

How do you use a slurry stone?

This is the easy part. Merely rub the slurry stone back and forth across your wet hone until you see a slurry!

Section 4 - 3, Norton

Norton makes a variety of abrasive and sharpening products. They produce popular waterstones used for honing razors. The 4000/8000 grit combination stones are the most popular.

Products

Norton 4K/8K

This is the most commonly used, discussed and recommended straight razor hone. It is a man made hone which is manufactured by Norton Abrasives, and created by taking abrasive powder, and creating "stone" by combining the powder with a binding agent. In layman's terms, think of it like putting sand in a puddle of glue, waiting for it to dry. Of course Norton has this down to a science, and the example was extremely primitive, but you get the point. These stones come in 2 sizes, and the one you ideally want is going ot be 8" X 3" by 1". The white side of the 4/8K is 4000 grit, and made in Italy, the yellow side of the hone is 8000 grit and made in the USA. As a "water stone" it uses water as a lubricant, and as a means to keep swarth (or metal deposits) from rendering the hone ineffective.

Pros

- This hone has 2 ideal grits for straight razors.
- This hone cuts relatively quickly, which is optimal for establishing an edge in a reasonable amount of time.
- Due to the size/width of the hone, you can keep the entire spine/edge on the hone at once, so you do not have to hone in the "X" pattern.
- These hones offer a superb value, as it is 2 grits in one hone.

Cons

- hone needs to be soaked for 15 minutes prior to use.
- This hone will need to be lapped periodically.
- This hone is somewhat fragile. If you drop it, it'll shatter.

- This is a relatively large/heavy hone, which can make it a little cumbersome for those who prefer to hold the hone in the palm of their hand (like myself) when honing.

Section 4 - 4, Coticule

What are they?

Coticule hones are natural earth stone quarried in the Ardennes region of Belgium from geological formations over 480 million years old.

Annual report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas Vol 3:

...
More detailed, however are the investigations into the nature of this stone by M. Renard.J These studies revealed the fact that the finer properties of the Belgian hone are due to the presence of microscopic garnets thickly and evenly distributed. Fine crystals of tourmaline and chrysoberyl are also present, and assist considerably in the process of abrasion. The stone is classed as a garnetyte by Renard.

It is the yellow portion of this stone which is valued as a hone ; and to preserve it from breaking it is customary to cement the pale yellow stone upon thin slabs of the purplish blue schist in which it occurs, unless the two are in contact and naturally united. This established custom of manufacturing the Belgian hone of two very characteristic stones furnishes excellent means of recognizing it. It is the best razor hone known, but it is not well adapted to other purposes.

The Non Metallic Minerals: Their Occurence and Uses:

According to Renard,1 the celebrated Belgian razor hone quarried at Lierreux, Sart, Salm-Chateau, Bihau, and Recht is a damourite slate containing innumerable garnets, more than 100,000 in a cubic millimeter. Like the Ratisbon hone, this occurs in the form of thin, yellowish bands, some 6 centimeters wide (2+ inches) in a blue-gray slate (phyllade). The bands are essentially parallel with one another and with the grain of the slate, into which they at times gradually merge. The chemical composition of a sample from Recht is given on the next page. The microscopic structure of the stone as described and figured by Renard is essentially the same as that of the Ratisbon stone in the collections of the U. S. National Museum, and the stones are practically identical in color and texture as well.

Section 4 - 5, Belgian Yellow Coticule New & Vintage

Belgian Coticules are world renowned and revered for creating incredibly sharp, incredibly fine, and superbly smooth edges on steel.
Yellow Coticules use a slurry stone (some times referred to as a "bout") to create a milky slurry to which to hone with. Due to the tremendous demand of Yellow Belgian Coticules, they are typically quite expensive, and are usually mounted to a dark bluish/black piece of slate to add stability.

(Note: although very uncommon, there are some 4K blue/8K yellow Belgian Coticule combination stones)

The abrasive/cutting agent in these hones is garnet, which is embedded into the stone, with a good quality (new) Yellow Coticule having about 30-40% garnet content. Since garnet is much harder than steel, it will quickly, and easily cut through steel, however the real key with these hones, and why they are the most common (and possibly desired) finishing hone is due to the Garnets having a unique shape, and the result is that they impart a smoother feeling edge when shaving, which many straight razors users prefer.
After honing on a 4/8K Norton, I use the Belgian Coticule with about 10-15 passes as a finishing stone on most razors, and on particularly hard razors, or Damascus razors, 15-30 passes. Sometimes I'll do the last few passes with no slurry, or use no slurry at all.

Vintage Belgian Yellow (sometimes white) Coticules are extremely expensive, and by many considered to be "the ultimate" razor hone. Since they are natural hones, and since the best cuts/stones have already been quarried, the "best of the best" in terms of Coticules are vintage Coticules. I personally have a vintage Coticule with about a 50-60% Garnet content, and it is noticeably finer, and provides a notably superior shaving edge.

Pro's

- Belgian Yellow Coticules do not need to be soaked prior to use, merely wet the top of the hone, raise a slurry with the slurry stone (merely takes a few seconds), and it's ready!
- Leaves an exceptionally smooth edge, which is incredibly smooth/easy on your face when shaving.
- Harder than a water stone, which means it doesn't have to be lapped too frequently, and the stone will not "load" with swarth or metal particles.
- Since both natural and limited in supply, these tend to hold their value quite well, and if anything will only go up in value. Check eBay top quality, old stones can go for more than a custom Damascus razor.
- These hones are fun to use!

Con's

- Yellow Coticules are not easily available from many sources, and are quite expensive.
- Since it is a natural product, quality, grit, etc can vary from stone to stone.
- While a hard stone, they still need to be lapped occasionally.
- Coticules tend to be smaller stones, good quality large stones the size of say a Norton 4/8K are uncommon and tremendously expensive.

Section 4 - 6, Belgian blue

Belgian Blue hones are natural earth stone quarried in Belgium.

Section 4 - 7, Chinese 12K

This is a stone I am quite fond of, and it always surprises me just how superbly well it works, and for such a bargain bin price. In fact, I am ashamed to admit, I wrote the stone off by and large due to them being so inexpensive. I just assumed they were nothing superlative to speak of. Boy was I wrong! In my opinion, if you want a natural finishing hone, look no further than the Chinese 12K. These natural water stones are EXCEPTIONALLY hard stones, almost ceramic like, and are quarried in the Guangxi province of China. While a "water stone" and while they recommend soaking the stone, I find it unnecessary, and personally I get superb results merely wetting the stone, and honing away. This stone cuts very, very, VERY slowly. I mean at least 50, usually 100 passes as a finishing. While it does take awhile to get that buttery smooth edge, once you're there, at least in my opinion, it is one of the nicest finishing hones and for a big hone (these are 8" X 2-3/4" X 1-1/4") and a solid hone (these aren't mounted to anything--these are all natural, all 12K honing material, and all useful/usable). These are an absolute steal for the paltry sum of $30! These stones do need to be flattened however, and they are incredibly hard, so make sure you have a diamond plate, and some patience, as it'll take some time to lap this sucker!

Pros

- Amazing deal, as they are inexpensive, readily available, large and all natural.
- Slow cutting, very hard to over hone, and works great for razors that "microchip" with faster cutting hones.
- These hones work exceptionally well, and since they are so hard after an initial lapping, you might not need to lap it ever again.
- These hones do not need to be soaked prior to use.

Cons

- Very slow cutting--can be time consuming.
- Very hard--can take a long time to lap.
- These hones offer very little "feedback" and feel as if you are running your razor across smooth glass.
- Somewhat boring to use.

Section 4 - 8, Barber hones

A Barber hone is a cheap and easy way to keep your straight razors sharp for years with the right use if the edge stays undamaged.

Barber hones are synthetic stones that were used by barbers to do a quick touch up of the edge, thereof the name. They are usually small, suited for the barbers to keep in their pocket.They are typically thin/light as well, and good ones work exceptionally well at keeping a keen shave worthy edge, keen, and shave ready by merely making 2-3 passes across the hone every week or two. The grit of a barber hone usually lies between 6K-12K depending on the maker, some hones are dual sided, with one coarse and one finisher side.

Barber hones are very hard, and do not need to be lapped very often, some claim that it is unnecessary to lap them at all.

Types of barber hones

There are probably hundreds of different barber hones available, most vintage but there are a few current makers as well.
Some that can be worth mentioning is:

- Franz Swaty
- Aloxite
- Lithide
- Keen Kutter

- Champion

Pictures

Pictures

FRANZ SWATY
MARBURG, AUSTRIA

EASY SKUTE HONE SIMPLE
SURE
This is the world's finest Hone. Makes better shaving edges, prolongs the life of your razor. Self lubricating soft mellow bond. Its non-heating, non-filling qualities are appreciated by all Barbers. Has two different cutting surfaces.
For best results use Coarse side first. Apply a little lather or cold water. Never use hot water. Or it may be used Dry. Always finish the edge on Fine side of Hone. For a perfect edge four to six strokes on each side of Hone are usually sufficient.
Should the surface become too smooth after long use, apply a little turpentine, rubbing with palm of hand or cloth. This will make the hone as good as when first used.
BadgerAndBlade.com

Pros

- Inexpensive and the good ones, work quite well.
- Fun and easy to use.

Cons

- Can be in bad/poor condition, or worse yet, can be too coarse to work well. (Somewhat of a shot in the dark whether you'll get a good one or bad)
- Very small, some can be tricky to use.

How to use

Because of their small size you will need to do x-pattern strokes when using a barber hone.
Barber hones can be either with water or lather or dry, this to ease the use.
Since barber hones are known to be fast, 5-10 strokes is usually enough to refresh a tugging edge, if the razor still isn't sharp enough repeat and try again.

- Place the spine carefully on the hone, without the blade touching the stone, slowly lower the edge to the hone.
- Adding no pressure slide the blade across the hone leading with the edge of the blade (opposite of when stropping)
- When hitting the end of the hone, roll the razor on the spine to turn the blade to the opposite direction.
- Remember to use X-stroke to make sure the entire length of the blade is covered.

See Honing for how to do the X-stroke.

Section 4 - 9, Spyderco hones

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

Spyderco hones are very neat/interesting hones that are not talked about too terribly often, however they are inexpensive, hard as can be, incredibly flat, and just about the easiest hone to use, as they can even be used dry! Dry,

with water, with lather--all extremely effective. These hones come in 3 different grits, medium (which has a brown color hone, with dark blue honing station), Fine (a white color hone with a light blue honing station) and Extra-Fine (a white color hone with a black honing station). The medium cuts incredibly fast and removes a lot of steel, the fine and ultra fine cut pretty quickly as well. The ultra-fine creates and incredibly fine/delicate edge, and works quickly and easily wet or dry. Cleaning the hones is a snap. A little powdered cleaner and a green scotch brite pad and they'll look good as new. These hones are incredibly hard (being ceramic) and the fine and ultra-fine will show no wear with use, and the medium will show minimal wear with use. These hones are 2" X 8" X .5"

Polishing/establishing the shaving sharp edge

CERAMIC WHET
STONE
FINE GRIT
Spyderco, Inc.
Made In U.S.A.
BadgerAndBlade.com

CERAMIC WHET
STONE
ULTRA FINE GRIT
Spyderco, Inc.
Made In U.S.A.
BadgerAndBlade.com

Pros

Size comparison - Spyderco ultra fine next to a [[Norton]] 4K/8K

- Reasonably priced, decent sized and work well.
- Cut very quickly/easily.
- Can be used dry, with water, or with lather.
- Minimal maintenance.

Cons

- Must use an "X" honing pattern
- Miserable to lap because they are so hard.
- Very heavy.

Section 4 - 10, Kitayama

The Kitayama stone is often advertised as a 12,000 grit water stone, but it is actually an 8,000-9,000 grit water stone. The interesting thing about the Kitayama stone however, is that while it is barely a finer grit than a Norton (if finer at all) it does a much, much better job at eliminating scratch patterns from hones, and as a result is quite a nice polishing/finishing hone, and will leave a very smooth, very nice edge on your razor. The Kitayama comes with

an artificial nagura stone, which I don't recommend using when honing razors with this stone as this stone is so soft it provides outstanding feel/feedback I think the nagura ends up doing more harm than good. Speaking of feedback by the way, this stone offers AMAZING feedback, and is just about the most fun hone to use. You can really feel what's going on and you just sort of "know" when the edge is perfectly honed. I am quite fond of this hone, and it is certainly striking, as it is quite large (8-1/8 X 3 X 1)and beautifully mounted to a large piece of wood. This hone is pretty easy to use, and I've found does not need to be soaked, merely wet the top of the hone, and it should be ready to go. Great hone, but overall, I think there are better, less expensive options.

Pro's

Very large/sturdy stone, does not require the "X" pattern when honing.

- Hone is ready quickly, just needs a little water on the top.
- Outstanding feedback from the hone, really fun to use.
- Exceptionally easy to use, and get good results from.

Con's

- At $70, this is a pretty expensive stone. For the money you can get a small Belgian Yellow Coticule New & Vintage, or for quite a bit less you could purchase a Chinese 12K or a spyderco ultra-fine.

- Hone is very heavy with the wooden base, a bit cumbersome to use when honing from the hand.
- This stone is very soft, and as a result will need to be lapped frequently.

- The included nagura stone is pretty useless/pointless.

Section 4 - 11, Thuringer

Fine grit natural razor hones. Most famous perhaps being the Escher's. Smooth, matte colors that may contain grays, greens, blues, yellows, even browns. Most commonly gray or gray/green. Grit estimations are in the range of 10-15k. Commonly cut long and narrow, 5x1, 7x1, 7x1.5, 7x2, etc. Commonly labeled as "German water Hone", "German Razor Hone" or similarly. Often found in wooden boxes with a slurry stone. Many vintage stones have instructions indicating the stone is to be always used with slurry. Instructions typically warn against the use of oil. There are theories passed around forums on which colors are superior. The only citable mention known suggests that brown is the highest quality.

Section 4 - 12, Arkansas

Description

Arkansas hones are mined in the Ouachita Mountains in Arkansas. They come in grits from around 500 to roughly 5000 (although exact figures vary depending on who you ask); the ordering is as follows from coarse to fine: Washita, Soft Arkansas, Hard Arkansas, Black Hard Arkansas (also known as Surgical Black) and Translucent Arkansas.
Annual report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas Vol 3

Ouachita (Washita) stone

The Ouachita stone has grains equally as fine as the Arkansas stone, and so will give equally as fine an edge when properly used; its porous structure, however, renders it unsuitable for fine instruments, but makes it much more

effective with larger tools. It is a hard stone but wears away comparatively fast, and both cuts away the steel rapidly and produces a fine edge. Owing to the peculiar cutting property of the edges of the pores this stone,* the finest results will not be obtained by both a forward and backward movement of the tool edge over the stone. With the Ouachita stone the forward movement involves considerable irregular cutting, while the backward movement produces scratches alone; thus a fine edge can be obtained by the backward movement. Since this movement is the one employed in honing razors(sic), the Ouachita stone can be and is utilized as a razor hone; it is better indeed for this purpose than the Arkansas, which will glaze under a honing treatment.

A hard stone, the Ouachita for example, can be scratched by the knife point; while a very hard stone, like the Arkansas, receives no scratch from the knife point.

Composition

The following is an average of several chemical analysis made of the Arkansas stone :

Average Analysis of Arkansas Novaculite:
Silica 99.5%
Alumina 0.20%
Iron (ferric) oxide 0.10%
Lime 0.10%
Magnesia 0.05%
Potash 0.10%
Soda 0.15%
Loss on ignition (water) 0.10%
Total 100.30 per cent.

Silica is the only mineral seen in the microscopic section of novaculite, but its arrangement is a matter of interest and importance. The groundmass is composed of densely crowded grains of silica, but here and there are little cavities generally appearing on first sight to be irregular, but which on closer examination are found to have rhombic outlines. These cavities show that lime in the form of calcite was formerly present in the stone, but that it has been leached away. The cavities are very small, averaging about .05 of a millimeter in diameter; a large one measured .12 by .07 of a millimeter. Sometimes they are filled with secondary silica, forming a grain of larger size than usual; other large grains of silica are occasionally found having a jagged outline and a diameter of about .05 of a millimeter.

These larger grains of silica may have some influence on the abrasive quality of the Arkansas stone, though it would appear that the cavities had more, since stone which is identical in other respects, but is almost entirely without cavities, has a finer grit. Thus in the Arkansas stone the abrasion by the

minute silica grains is materially assisted by the sharp cutting edges of the rhombic cavities about which the grains are closely packed.

Hardness

The Arkansas novaculite cannot be scratched by a knife point. Quartz will scratch it, however, and in turn it will scratch quartz; hence its hardness may be considered identical with that of quartz.

Analyses of the Ouachita stone show it to have the same chemical composition as the Arkansas stone; and experiments on the solubility of the silica show a percentage of soluble silica slightly smaller than that of quartz crystals, so the soluble silica is reduced to a minimum in this stone. Under the microscope silica is found to form the groundmass as in the Arkansas stone, and its grains are equally fine. Fine particles of iron are visible, and specks of carbon occur, but these minerals are in such small quantity that they do not affect the color, and to the eye the stone appears perfectly white. A very few flakes of muscovite mica are seen. The larger grains of silica seem more plentiful than in the Arkansas stone, and frequently give polarization colors; but this is because the rock sections are thicker than those of Arkansas stone.

The remarkable qualities of the Ouachita stone depend upon the existence of many cavities in a dense groundmass. As in the Arkansas stone these cavities have a rhombohedral form, but they play a much more important part in the Ouachita stone because they are somewhat larger and much more numerous.* On account of the larger size and greater number of the cavities in the Ouachita stone they are much more easily studied in that stone than in the Arkansas; in fact they were first noted in the Ouachita. In size these cavities are very constant and average about .07 of a millimeter in diameter. The outlines are often obscured by the presence of silica which has either been pushed into the cavity since the disappearance of the calcite or has been deposited there from solution, yet the original form of the cavity can usually be traced. Small cavities .03 or .04 of a millimeter in diameter are sometimes completely filled with secondary silica, but the large ones are never so filled. There is a sufftcient number of perfect rhombic forms left to prove beyond a doubt that the imperfect forms have had the same origin. Sections of the Ouachita stone seem to contain a large amount of foreign matter in the form of dust, but the chemical analyses do not indicate the presence of such matter, and as it usually appears in the cavities it is probably the dust from the grinding material used in preparing the microscopic sections.

The outline of the rhombohedral cavities is singularly accented in many cases by an arrangement of the silica grains with their long axes perpendicular to the sides of the cavity and very closely packed together. The grains are angular but the arrangement gives an appearance like brick work in a mass of rubble. This layer of silica grains is only about .01 of a millimeter thick; beyond it is the usual groundmass of silica. It is evident in almost all cases that the silica is more compact about the cavities than elsewhere though it may not show the brick-like structure. As a result of this compactness the sides of the cavities present fine cutting edges to a tool rubbed upon the stone. That these act as cutting edges must be the case for there is nothing else in Ouachita stone

different from the Arkansas stone to render it capable of producing the much faster abrasion which the Ouachita accomplishes. These edges then do the rapid work of abrasion, and at the same time there is a constant fine scratching going on from contact with the grains of silica; so that the Ouachita stone produces a fine edge in a short time. By moving the edge backward over the stone the cutting effect of the edges of the rhomb is lost, and the scratching alone gives a finish to a tool edge as fine as can be obtained on an Arkansas stone. It is for this reason that the Ouachita stone can be used as a razor hone. The reason why the Ouachita stone cannot be used for fine-pointed tools lies in the fact that the partitions between the cavities are thin and easily broken away by a pointed instrument; such use soon produces an irregular surface and ruins the stone.

Section 4 - 13, Shapton

Company Info

Shapton is a Japanese company producing hones.

Product Info

- **Hones**

External Links

- Shapton - Company website (Japanese)
- Shapton USA - The Shapton North American distributor

Section 4 - 14, DMT

Company Info

DMT (Diamond Machining Technology) is a US company founded in 1976 producing diamond-based sharpening tools.

Product Info

- **Hones**

External Links

- DMT - Company website

Section 4 - 15, Chromium III oxide

Chromium(III) oxide is an inorganic chemical compound commonly used in the upkeep of a straight razor's edge. More commonly referred to as crox, chromox or chromium oxide, chromium(III) oxide is actually one of several known oxides of the metal chromium.

Contents

1. 1Chemical composition and toxicity
2. 2How to use
3. 3Other uses

Chemical composition and toxicity

Chromium(III) oxide has the empirical formula of Cr[sub]2[/sub]O[sub]3[/sub], meaning that for every two chromium atoms there are three oxygen atoms. Although this may seem to suggest that chromium(III) oxide exist as discreet molecules containing only five atoms, two of chromium and three of oxygen, this is not the case. Chromium(III) oxide is actually a large, crystalline macromolecule composed on repeating units of chromium and oxygen atoms in a ratio of 2:3.

While chromium(III) oxide contains chromium, it is relatively non-toxic. This is because chromium(III) oxide a trivalent form of chromium, meaning that each chromium atom in the compound carries a charge of +3. This distinction is important as it is hexavalent chromium, meaning that each chromium atom carries a charge of +6, that is widely known to be toxic. Although this may not seem a major difference to some, the difference is enough that it allows hexavalent chromium to easily cross cellular membranes inside the body where it is converted into trivalent chromium, accumulates and begins to disrupt cellular processes. Trivalent chromium, on the other hand, does not easily cross cellular membranes and, in small amounts, is actually an essential nutrient that helps regulate the metabolism of proteins and lipids in the body.

How to use

Chromium(III) oxide is abrasive, with a hardness of roughly 8-8.5 on the Mohs scale. To use, a thin layer is applied to either a paddle or hanging strop, and this strop is then utilized essentially like a hone. (Also see Applying paste to a strop)

Other uses

In addition to its use as an abrasive, chromium(III) oxide is also a commonly used pigment in paints, inks and glasses due in part to its considerable stability. In such applications, it is known, among other names, as viridian.

Section 4 - 16, Abrasive Pasted Strops

Abrasive pasted strops are extremely effective means to getting and keeping your straight razor sharp, and most certainly are the easiest. While you can paste a hanging, or paddle strop, the ideal pasted strop is going to be in paddle form, as it is less apt to "give" and will be much flatter than a hanging stop pulled taught. Abrasive pastes come in a various materials/abrasive agents from diamond, to chrome oxide, red paste, green paste, black paste--the list goes on and on, but the common objective is to apply the pastes to a paddle strop to act as a "hone." Once these abrasive pastes have been applied to the strop, they embed themselves into the strop (either balsawood or leather) and the simple act of stropping will actually remove metal, and polish the edge of your razor. Using a pasted paddle strop takes no special skill (unlike honing) and has very little to no learning curve associated with it. Pasted paddle strops are also one of the more cost effective means of keeping your razor scary sharp, as a 4 sided strop is not terribly expensive, and will give you the ability to have 4 different grits on the strop. The most popular abrasive pastes are diamond paste, and green chrome oxide. Diamond pastes come in various grits, expressed as "Micron" ranging from 9 micron (very coarse) to .25 micron (SUPER fine), while green chrome oxide comes in one "grit" - .5 micron, and is the most popular finishing option, as many feel it provides the smoothest possible shaving edge. Diamond paste is also incredibly fast cutting, which allows you to VERY quickly make your razor a terror, so in my opinion this is the best option for new straight razor users, as it is so quick/easy.

Pros

class="floatcontainer" |

- The quickest/easiest method of keeping your straight razor sharp, with little to no learning curve.
- Very inexpensive, and gives you up to 4 different grit options.
- Never needs to be lapped/flattened.

Cons

- Some feel edges created from pastes (vs hones) do not stay sharp as long and need to be refreshed sooner.
- Strops can inadvertently be cut/nicked.
- Residue (paste) from the spine/blade must be wiped off each time you switch to a different grit, or plain leather.
- You must apply more pastes from time to time, which are not inexpensive.

Section 4 - 17, Dovo Tortoise Special Hone Comparison/Results

First, an overview. This is a continuation of THIS thread, or rather - the results of the test. The purpose of this test, is to try some of the most commonly used hones/pastes and provide insight/feedback based on the efficacy of the different sharpening methods. While this is called "8-Ways" it's actually more than this, as it is 8 ways (or razors) at once, however as I felt a finishing method was inferior, I would "knock it out" of the test by re-honing the razor, and finishing it on another method, for a total of 12 different "finishes."

Here are the finishing methods used within this test:

1. Right off the Norton 8K (to compare the difference between the 8K to whichever finishing hone)
2. A Chinese 12K
3. A Belgian Coticule
4. Escher
5. Carborundum Barber Hone
6. Kitayama
7. .25 Micron Diamond paste
8. .5 Micron Green Chromide
9. Spyderco Ultra-Fine
10. DMT 8K Diamond Plate
11. Newsprint
12. Belgian Yellow Coticule New and Vintage

Note: I grade them on an A - F scale (A being the best) based on their use/deployment as a finishing stone. This has nothing to do with the quality of the stone, the value, etc... it is PURELY based on performance. For instance, while some stones may not get the highest "grade" for instance, the Belgian Coticule, I still really like the stone, and feel it's a superb stone to use to jump to higher grits/finishes.

Let's get started!

Norton 8k

The edge right off of the Norton 8K can be quite good actually. If you are experienced, and have a perfectly lapped hone you should be able to hone up a very nice, shave worthy edge on a Norton 8k. Now, while the edge is nice, it

certainly leaves plenty of room for improvement, and I personally wouldn't want to have to shave with a razor off of a Norton 8K daily, but you could, and you could do so comfortably. Overall about a C.

Chinese 12K

The 12K is a very slow cutting stone, yet it delivers just a lovely polish. The edge feels VERY smooth against ones face, and is a radical improvement over the Norton 8K. The edge cuts very softly, and the blade feels very nice and comfortable against ones face. The edge finished on the Chinese 12K also seems to last quite a long time, and personally I feel this hone leaves a nicer finish/edge than the Belgian Coticule, however it does not cut as fast (which to me is not a bad thing) and can take longer to use. The edge I was getting from my lapped Chinese 12K was superior to that of my newly quarried Belgian Coticule (which is 6X the price of the Chinese 12K) and both are natural stones. At least in my opinion this is the best finishing stone for the money. For $30, you just can't go wrong. B+

Belgian Coticule

The coticule is about the most fun hone in my collection to use. It provides tremendous feedback (both felt and heard) and quickly and easily polishes the edge of a straight razor. Shaves from my newly quarried Coticule were smooth, irritation free, and quite nice, although I must admit, it left me wanting a finer/smoother edge. While very quick, and superbly easy to use, I preferred the smoother, more refined edge off of the Escher, Spyderco Ultra-Fine and the Chinese 12K. A great stone, and quite a bit of fun to use, but for the money, I feel there are superior options. (Note: finished with no slurry) Overall - B.

Escher

Most everything you've heard about the Escher is probably true. This is a much finer hone than the coticule, yet cuts in a similar fashion. For some reason, it isn't as much fun to use, at least for me, but it provides a much smoother, polished edge than that of the coticule. The edge from off an Escher has a fabulous mix of wonderfully smooth/comfortable on ones face, yet tremendously fine/thin and seriously sharp. For an edge this sharp, it is very forgiving, which makes this a really lovely polishing stone, and as a result they are highly desirable and pretty darn expensive. (Note: finished with no slurry) Rating = A-

Carborundum Barber Hone

The edge off of the carbo is actually quite nice for how inexpensive these stones are. I'd rank it right around a Belgian Coticule, very nice, fine and comfortable. Rating = B

Kitayama

This stone is certainly a cut above a Norton 8K, however I had mixed results with it. I was able to get the best edge from this hone without using a slurry, or the included slurry stone, and it was often a bit tricky to really get a razor where I wanted it, but once there, I felt this stone was every bit as good as the newly quarried Belgian Coticule, in fact, I thought it was superior. For me, this edge seemed smoother, and more refined than the Coticules edge. I'd put this stone smack dab in between the Coticule and the Chinese 12K. Since it is 2X more expensive than the Chinese 12K, I think the choice is pretty obvious. Rating = B

.25 Micron Diamond Paste

After working my way from 1 micron to .25 micron diamond paste, I had a REALLY mean edge on the razor. Much finer/sharper feeling on the face, and not nearly as forgiving as the other finishing methods, but certainly the sharpest. Some do not like the feeling of an edge off .25 micron and find it too harsh. Personally I quite like it, and while it doesn't feel as "smooth" or "luxurious" on your face as an edge does from a polishing stone, it's certainly sharper. If you're looking for the "sharpest" of the bunch, this is the clear winner, but if you're looking for a razor that feels smooth against your skin, this probably isn't your deal. The edge off of diamond pastes doesn't seem to hold up/last as long as the edge off of a hone, however I think this is somewhat moot as a touch up stropping on the diamond paste (which takes merely a few seconds) will instantly restore the edge. Rating = A -

.5 Micron Green Chromide

Of the pastes, this is probably my favorite. While it doesn't leave as micro-fine an edge as the .25 micron diamond paste, it does leave a very, very fine edge, yet it is also incredibly smooth, much more so than diamond paste. Like

diamond paste, the edge from the green chrome doesn't holdup/last as long as one off of a hone, however again, it is much easier/less time consuming to refresh than that of an edge off of a hone. I think green chrome is a wonderful cross between the buttery-smooth feeling of the edge against your skin, and whisking away hairs like that of a hone, yet with the finer, sharper edge from pastes. Rating = A

Spyderco Ultra-Fine

This is a neat, inexpensive hone. The edge off the Spyderco Ultra-Fine, is well, ultra fine! VERY highly polished, and very smooth against ones face. This was also probably the easiest hone to use, and worked best dry. My results/experience is that the edge off of the Spyderco Ultra-Fine is sharper than that of an Escher, yet the Escher's edge feels a little smoother on your face, and as a result, I'd rate this hone about on par with the Escher. Rating = A-

DMT 8K Diamond Plate

This diamond plate worked quite well, and provided an edge that was, in my opinion a touch better than the Norton 8K. I REALLY like this hone, as it cuts VERY quickly, in fact I would advocate gents purchase this INSTEAD of a Norton 4/8K, as it leaves a finer edge than the 8K side of the Norton, yet cuts FASTER than the 4K side of the Norton, and is a few bucks less expensive. Personally I am quite fond of this hone, and it makes honing quite simple. I don't know that I would want to use this as a finishing hone, but I do know I haven't used my Norton since I received this hone. An 8K that cuts faster than a 4K, that never needs lapping. What's not to like! Rating = C+

Newsprint

Well, this isn't too glamorous: grabbing the local newspaper and stropping on it. Well, in any case, I tried it. For an edge right off the 8K of a Norton, it seemed to smooth things up just a touch, but nothing to fantastic. This really seemed to shine however, to "calm" other edges down. Let me explain, an edge off .25 micron diamond paste is VERY fine and tremendously sharp, yet it feels a little rough against your face, and while it will give you an amazing shave, it almost feels as if the razors isn't as sharp as it should be against your face, as it "digs" into your beard because the edge is so incredibly fine. It works amazing, but many don't like the feel of the shave. Now, by taking a big hard back book, and laying some newspaper on the book (both to elevate it, and provide a flat surface) and lightly stropping the newsprint, I was able to keep the good attributes of .25 diamond paste, IE: the super sharp edge, while marginalizing the bad attributes, IE: the harshness. Diamond paste, or the Spyderco Ultra-Fine coupled with newsprint yielded remarkably fine, yet smooth and forgiving edges. I really like what newspaper seems to have done, and I'll certainly use this trick from time to time. Rating = A

Belgian Yellow Coticule New and Vintage

My vintage Coticule seemed to perform much like an Escher, however the edge it put on the razor seemed to be the most rigid, and last the longest. A very fine, smooth, polished edge, yet very sturdy and robust. Of the stones in this review, it's one of the best. (Note: finished with no slurry) Rating = A-

Personal Opinions

Firstly, I would recommend the DMT 8K from craftsman studio over the Norton 4/8K, as I feel it leaves a finer edge than the 8K Norton, yet cuts faster than a 4K, which makes for quick work of establishing a bevel and getting a razor shaving sharp.

Next - I would probably recommend finishing on diamond pastes, all the way down to .25 micron - then finishing on newsprint for the keenest, and easiest edge.

Now, if you are a fan of hones/honing, or if for some reason you are against pastes, as some fellas are for some reason, I'd suggest a Chinese 12K, or a Spyderco Ultra-Fine. I feel both offer tremendous value, based on their superlative results and price, and both are very hard and require little, to no maintenance.

I still think Coticules and Eschers are superb, and I will continue to own, collect and finish razors on them for kicks... but I feel, at least in terms of pure efficacy, they aren't worth the $, and there are superior options. I have been honing like mad with a Shapton 16K and 30K glass stone lately, and feel if you are going to be spending $100+ on a stone, it should be the Shapton 16K. While not part of this test, and while I feel you need an "in-between" hone (such as a Chinese 12K) before jumping from the 8K Norton or 8K DMT to the Shapton 16K, I do feel for the $100 or so price tag the hands down "king of the hill" is the Shapton 16K glass stone for $99. For me, it is markedly superior to ANY of my Eschers or Coticules, and provides a superior edge. As for the 30K Shapton, so far it's pretty incredible, but there is a tremendous amount of "diminishing marginal utility" as you leave the $99 16K Shapton, and enter the $280 30K Shapton. The 30K Shapton is exceptional, and puts a feather-like (possibly sharper) edge on a razor, but you can get the identical result by using the 16K Shapton, then finishing on .25 micron diamond paste. More info/results/feedback to come on the 16 and 30K Shapton Glass stones in another thread as I use them more.

Section 5, Stropping how to's

Section 5 - 1, Selecting a Strop

What you NEED, versus what you WANT are 2 totally different subjects, and

the truth of the matter is, you can get pretty OK results stropping on a yellow legal pad. What works best however, is leather, so you really need a decent leather strop. Now, provided you don't nick/cut up your strop on accident, and take proper care of it, a decent quality strop will last you a lifetime and is well worth the investment, to a point.

Getting back to what you NEED. The nice thing about this subject is there IS a very clear answer:
A simple leather strop is enough. It doesn't need to be the top of the line since you will most likely damage that strop. You could also go with a combo strop that has a piece of canvas and leather. You don't need the canvas to strop your straight but, stropping on canvas first will extend the period of time between honing sessions. So why start with a cheap strop? Firstly, you are most likely to nick your strop while learning the technique. Secondly, these low priced strops performs just as well as the more expensive ones. The difference in strops pricing has often little to do with quality, it has mostly to do with cost (of the hardware) and the additional time/labor involved in making the fancy handles, affixing swivels, having a linen side, etc.

With the above said, if you want the prettiest strop in the land, and it's worth the extra $ (3-4X more expensive) and you are willing to take the risk of potentially nicking up/ruining your expensive strop, by all means indulge, you won't be disappointed. If, on the other hand, you can control yourself, from a performance or quality aspect there is absolutely no reason to buy anything other than a less expensive beginner/travel strop, and you can put the money saved on the strop towards things such as hones, and better razors, which WILL affect the quality of your shave.

BadgerAndBlade.com

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Section 5 - 2, How to Hold a Strop Without a Handle

Strops are sometimes built with a handle and sometimes they are not. When a strop does not have a handle, it might be difficult for a new straight razor shaver to hold the strop properly. This page will show a few grips on how to hold your strop.

The Grips

The strop that was used in this demonstration is a Kanayama 30,000. Each grip will show a picture from top and the side. The strop is not hooked.

Grip 1

Pinching the strop using your thumb and fist.

Grip 2

Holding the sides of the strop.

Grip 3

Pinching the strop between your fingers.

Section 5 - 3, How to use your hanging strop

The instructions are identical whether you are using a linen/canvas side or not. Assuming you have a linen/canvas side to the strop, start with the canvas/linen side as shown below. If you do not have a canvas/linen side on your strop, merely use the same method - just on the smooth leather side of the strop.

You would use your strop between **each** shave. The number of laps vary from person to person. On average, the minimum is around 50-60 laps on leather. Anything else is extra that will potentially make your edge last longer.

Step 0

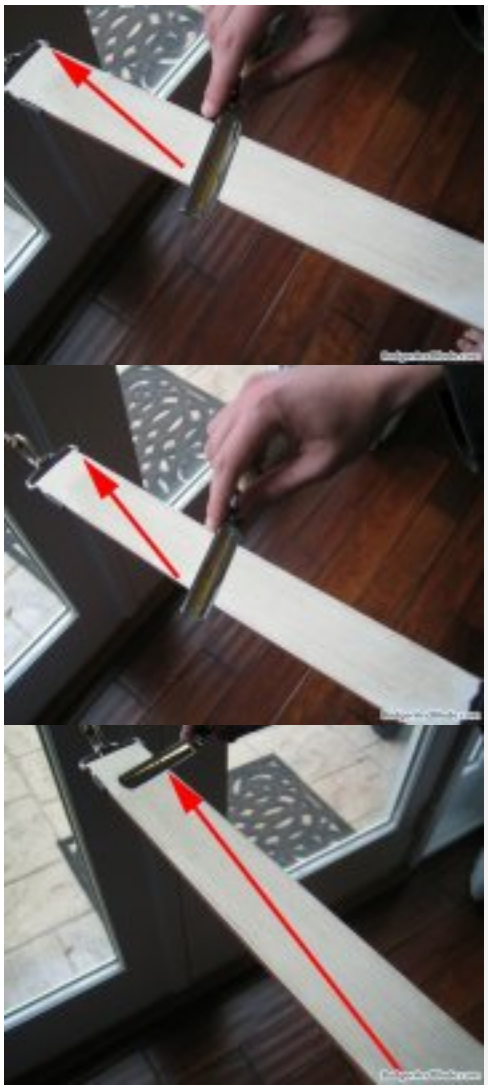
How to hold the razor while stropping. It is important that you hold the razor correctly, to ensure that a) you are able to effectively turn the razor at the end of each stroke, so as not to damage the strop, and b) you are able to maintain control and pressure without fatigue, which will impact your technique. This video demonstrates the correct way to hold the razor whilst stropping.

Step 1

Start with the linen/canvas side facing up (so you can see it) and firmly pull the strop taut straight out towards you so it is as flat as possible.

Step 2

Using NO pressure, leading with the spine, and keeping the razors spine and blade as flat as possible, slide the razor across the strop in a diagonal manner (see picture below) so that the entire length of the blade is stropped across the canvas/linen.



Step 3

Roll the razor, picking the edge of the razor off of the strop, and turning the razor around in the opposite direction.

Step 4

Perform a DIAGONAL stroke the same manner as in step 2, yet in the opposite direction, you have just made an elongated "X" across the strop as the two strokes (one in each direction) combined to look like an "X." Step 2 and 4 combined are considered 1 complete stroke or pass. Do approximately 30 passes/strokes (both directions).

Step 5

Flip the strop over to the leather side, and strop back and forth in the same manner as above about 60 times.

Your razor has been properly stropped, and ready to shave!

Section 5 - 4, How to take care of your strop

FROMM
#364
Strop Dressing
Directions: Using a soft cloth and a circular motion rub dressing into the face of the leather. Let dry 24 hours. Repeat. Some stain in the leather may rub out while applying. This is normal and not a cause for alarm.
1919 Stanley Street
Northbrook, IL 60062
1-800-323-4252
Made in U.S.A.

Most strops when new will need little to nothing done to them. If they happen to be a bit bent (due to shipping) put it on a flat surface (like a table) and put a heavy book or two on the strop to flatten it out.

Periodically apply some strop dressing (like the product on the right) to your strop to keep it supple and hydrated. Some prefer neatsfoot oil, and various other products, and some strops (like Tony Millers) will often come with either a blend of oils he uses, or a dressing similar to the one on the right (Fromm #364). Different products are applied in different manners, but if it is a strop specific product it will tell you how to apply it, as does the example below.

If you happen to nick your strop, provided it isn't a big gash, relax! You can still effectively use your strop. Each case is a little different, but typically you merely need to remove the loose piece so it isn't flopping around. Sometimes it may be necessary to use some VERY fine grit sandpaper to polish up the area to make sure it is smooth and below the main level of the hone, as if the nick is below where the razors spine/edge touch, you shouldn't have a problem.

Provided you are reasonably careful with your strop, and take good care of it, it should last a lifetime!

Section 5 - 5, Applying paste to a strop

Abrasive pasted strops are extremely effective means to getting and keeping your straight razor sharp, and most certainly are the easiest. While you can paste a hanging, or paddle strop, the ideal pasted strop is going to be in paddle form, as it is less apt to "give" and will be much flatter than a hanging strop pulled taught.

Types of Paste

Abrasive compounds come in three styles/consistencies. There are pastes, putties/somewhat pliable blocks, and liquids. The most common form of abrasive paste for use with straight razors is diamond paste.

A syringe of Amplex diamond paste, a tube of TI white "putty-like" paste, and .5 Micron Green Chrome Oxide
Since diamond paste is the most commonly used, for this example, I am going to use .5-micron Amplex diamond paste. The "Grade #1/2 MB" on the box

below stands for ½ or .5 micron.

Applying the Paste

Refreshing a heavily used pasted strop, or starting a new pasted strop is done in the same manner, and is quick, and easy.

Step 1

Select the proper side or strop in which you wish to use the diamond paste, and make sure it is properly marked so you don't mix up which paste is where.

Step 2

Apply a small amount of paste across the center of the strop. In this example, I probably used a little too much. It's better to have not enough than too much as you can always add more if needed, however adding too much is wasteful, and diamond paste isn't cheap.

Step 3

Take the area of your hand under your thumb in the palm of your hand, and lightly spread the paste across the strop.

Step 4

You should now have diamond paste in the palm (in the meaty part under the thumb) of your hand and the paste should be a little more evenly distributed. Now, take the paste on your palm, and begin to work it across the entire strop.

Step 5

Keep working the paste into the strop using circular motions until the paste is completely and evenly distributed and most of the paste has settled into the strop. You'll know you're finished, as it will seem like there is nothing more you can really do. Ideally let your newly pasted strop sit for a day or so, so the paste isn't too wet (it will still work fine, but it'll put a fair amount of paste on whatever razor you are using on it) and mission accomplished. Go wash your hands!

Section 5 - 6, How to Restore a Strop

Disclaimer

There are many ways to restore an item and keep in mind that each item might require a slightly different method. Also, proceed with care as the last thing that anyone would want is to ruin their item. If you are unsure, ask some questions on the forum or send it to a professional to restore the item. The bottom line, this technique worked for the item presented in the article, it

might not work for your item. Make sure that you read the tutorial completely before you launch yourself into restoring your first strop.

The Restoration

Some of us will buy a strop off eBay eventually just like any straight razor. The strop can be in good/average/bad condition depending on how it was taken care of. Some of them are very old and might need a conditioner to restore the leather.

Before you start

The first thing that you need to make sure is that you don't have any nicks or cut that can catch the blade while stropping. Run the palm of your hand on the leather for a few laps. Use the tip of your fingers specially on each border of the strop to make sure that the leather is completely flat. If the leather has bits and pieces that can cause problems(feel sharp, tiny piece of leather comes up, etc) while stropping, use a piece of high grit sand paper to sand out the nick. Start with 1000 and go lower only if the nick is not coming out. Keep in mind, the lower the sand paper, the more scratches.

Each restoration is somehow unique by itself as not all second hand products are in the same condition. This should guide you toward the right way.

Let's get started

Again, this is not necessarily the best method but it worked for the item in this guide.

The restoration will be done on a vintage Russian strop in good condition and has a few minor nicks. Those nicks and issues where sanded out before the restoration. The leather feels like Horsehide, however, it's a bit stiff. Good thing, it's not cupping and the leather is not cracked. The strop was used for a few days but the leather is very hard and compared to the pictured Kanayama strop, the leather should be more malleable.

What do you need?

From a country to another, the basic products will not be the same, however, you can probably find a product to wash/clean the leather and then condition it. It is advised to use saddle soap to clean and neatsfoot oil is best to

condition leather. For this tutorial, neatsfoot oil was unavailable. The local leather man shop around the corner had some leather conditioner to restore and protect the leather. This product was already used on shoes before and the results were good as the leather was softer, easier to bend and looked nicer. This is the reason why this product was used in this tutorial.

Items required:

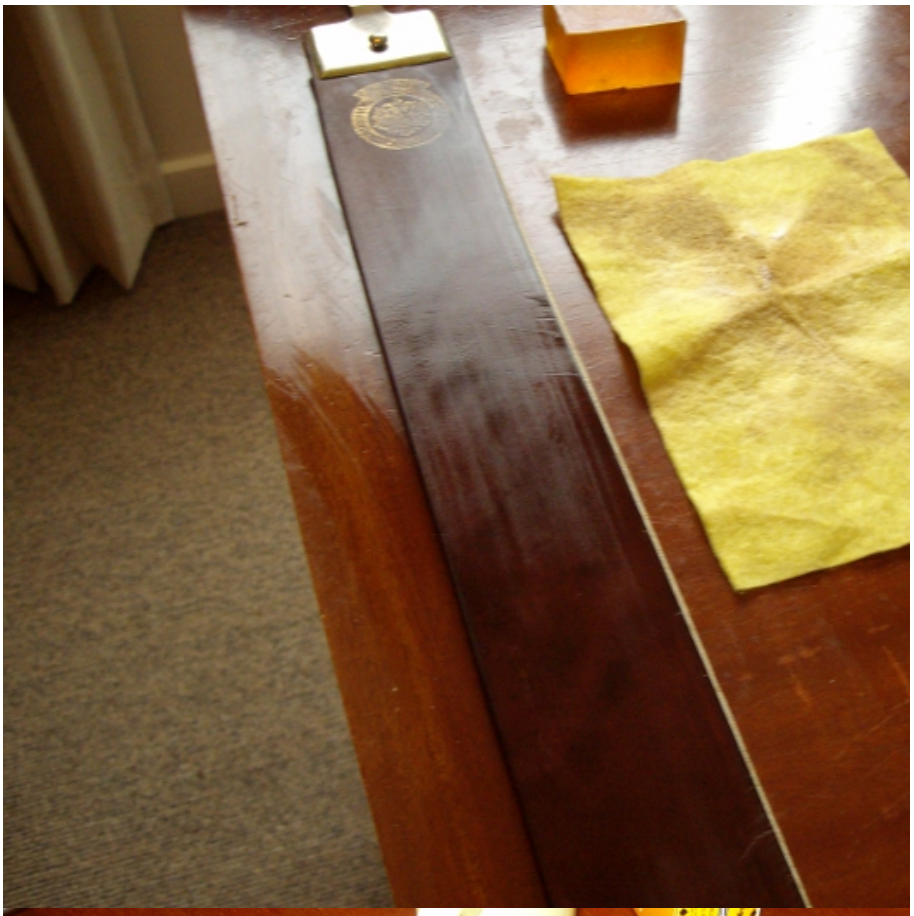
- A strop that needs restoration
- A clean piece of cloth (this is from the cleaning section of the supermarket, an old t-shirt would also be acceptable)
- Saddle soap with neatsfoot oil specifically made to clean leather
- Leather Conditioner (Fromm is another brand that could be used)

A bit more on those products

The leather conditioner is from a company in Australia named Minit

The Saddle soap comes with instructions. The instructions are: Apply with a soft damp cloth, rub gently to develop lather and remove dirt. Avoid hard rubbing but wipe all the surface. Rinse cloth and wipe down. When dry, polish with a clean cloth. I'm missing the last line because of the glare.

The Steps



TIP - Hanging the strop is the best way to let it dry.

The cleaning process with the saddle soap was repeated

3 times on both sides of the leather piece.

The conditioner procedure was repeated 3 times on both sides of the leather piece.

It's not as malleable as the Japanese strop but it's much better!

Section 6, The straight razor shave

Section 6 - 1, Holding the Straight Razor and Blade Angle

Step 1

Open the razor and place it on a level surface

Step 2

Take your hand, and hold your fingers accordingly, as these 4 fingers are the ones to be used in holding the razor

Step 3

Place your fingers over the razor as shown in the picture below, with your forefinger and middle finger on the left side of the scales, and your ring finger on the right side of the scales, keeping your thumb to the left, and placing it on the shank/jimps of the razor.

Step 4

Pick up the razor

More information

For more information on how to hold a straight razor, please consult this page.

The importance of blade angle

Simply put, it's all in the angle. If the blade is flat against your face, it will not cut your beard, and if at a 90 degree angle, it'll likely cut more of you than your beard! Ideally you want about a 30 degree angle, however it can vary based on different razors and such. The easiest way to determine the proper

angle, is to put the razor nearly flat against your face, near your sideburn at the top of your cheek, and as you slide the razor down your face, slowly tilt the razor away from you (while keeping contact with your face) and at a certain point you'll feel and hear the hairs shave right off. It's this angle that you want to keep for the majority of your face/neck. In some areas, you can tilt the razor back a little more (which will cause the razor to "bite in" at the hairs more aggressively) to get a little more aggressive, which is the beauty of the straight razor shave, and why they can deliver the closest shave, as unlike a DE or a cartridge razor that has a "fixed" angle, the entire time you are shaving with a straight razor, the angle is constantly changing based on what works best for YOUR face. It's the ULTIMATE adjustable razor!

Section 6 - 2, More Straight Razor Grips

Grips

Please note that the passes are mentioned as an example and you might have a different direction for WTG, XTG and ATG.

The positioning of the fingers can vary slightly from one user to another. Some will keep the pinky under the tang, on the tang, or in the air.

WTG	Shaving WTG (With The Grain). This grip is used for passes WTG (North-South)	Shaving WTG
XTG	Shaving XTG (Across the Grain). This grip is used for passes XTG (Ear to Mouth)	Shaving XTG

ATG	Shaving ATG (Against The Grain). This grip is used for passes ATG (South-North)	Shaving ATG
XTG/Touch-ups	Shaving XTG/Touch-ups (Agrainst The Grain and Touch-ups). This grip is used for passes XTG (Ear to Mouth) and to touch-up missed areas.	Shaving XTG and Touch-ups

More Grips

This part of the page intends to list more grips taken by various users.

Alternate Grips 1

Credits to Drybonz for the pictures.

Alternate Grips 2

Credits to Luc for the pictures. Those grips would apply if the left side of my face would be shaved.

Section 6 - 3, Straight Razor/The Do's and Don'ts!

This is not an all encompassing list, but some helpful pointers before you get started.

Do

- Take your time and make sure you will not be rushed the first few times you use your straight razor.
- Read up as much as you can, and ideally read this guide, and watch the youtube video of me shaving with a straight razor before trying your first straight razor shave.
- Make sure you properly prep your beard--wash your face with a cleanser, and use a hot towel or splash warm/hot water on your face to soften your beard hair.
- Use a shaving brush to raise the hair on your face, and build a thick/rich lather on your face. Take extra time to really work it in, and let the cream/soap you are using soften your beard.
- Take small/short strokes--confident strokes. Unlike a DE razor, you will feel feedback from the razor cutting your beard. Hold the razor firmly (not OVERLY firm or tight, but hold it knowing if you drop it, it'll ruin the razor, and potentially hurt you) and be confident in your short/quick strokes.
- Thoroughly dry your hands before picking up your razor. You don't want slippery hands!
- STRETCH THE SKIN! Stretching your skin, and pulling it taut is essential to getting a close, and effective shave. There is no safety bar, or plastic fins to pull your skin taut for you like there is with a cartridge razor or a DE.

- Have fun!

Don't

- EVER, EVER, EVER move the blade horizontally on your face. With a 3-inch devilishly sharp blade on your face, ANY horizontal movement will result in a serious cut.
- Forget to watch the tip of the blade. You may be so busy stretching your skin, and trying not to cut yourself, you forget to watch the tip of the blade. You do NOT want to detach your earlobe from your head, or slice into your nostril, or worse yet, if you have a spike, catch it into the side of your cheek. YIKES!
- Rush yourself. This is NOT a race. If it takes you an hour to master your first straight razor shave, there's no shame in it. Take your time, relax, and enjoy yourself.
- Push yourself. If you are doing well, don't push it. Master the basics before you start shaving against the grain, and doing more complex maneuvers.
- Use another type of razor (DE, Electric, Cartridge) to touch up areas you might not have done too well in. This is counter-productive to you learning how to properly tackle all areas of your face.
- Be afraid to ask questions. We were ALL beginners at once. While you may think your question is silly/stupid, every one of us more than likely had the same question at one point or another, and I assure you, sounding silly on a forum is not nearly as embarrassing as walking around with toilet paper on your face, absorbing the blood for the cut on your face.
- Give up. Straight razor shaving is not dangerous or for that matter, all that difficult, but it DOES have a steep/long learning curve. If you've read the entire guide up until this point, likely you have the desire to really succeed. If you don't get the results you want in a week, or a month, be patient--it can take months!

Section 6 - 4, Straight Razor Tips and Tricks

Disclaimer

Keep in mind that those are tips and tricks provided by the community in order to help you have a better success at straight razor shaving. Those tips and tricks might not work for you.

Regardless of what you use for your shave

All rules apply! Good prep, good lather, good technique! This page should help you with your technique. As always, keep in mind that you won't get any magic formula! Shaving with a straight razor takes time.

Tips and Tricks

Before you start

- Make sure that you have a Shave Ready straight razor. A factory honed razor is not shave ready. Have a pro sharpen it for you, chances are, that you will get a better results than doing it yourself. Knowing what is shave ready without having a shave ready razor is difficult to measure.
- If you drop the razor, do not try to catch it!

During the Shave

- Keep your hands and the razor as dry as possible. The grip will be better and you will reduce any chances of causing rust and pitting.
- Use a sponge to wipe the razor clean. Wet the sponge, squeeze as much water out and then you can use it to wipe the lather off the straight while you shave. Use a stropping motion to do so. A sponge will be easier to clean than a towel.
- Keep the spine almost flat to your face while shaving. You need a really small angle.
- Hold the razor securely. It needs to become a fixed item in your hand. Also, keep in mind, that putting pressure is not a good idea.
- You can wet the tip of your fingers and rub them on an alum bloc or styptic pencil. This will help stretching your skin.
- Use both hands while shaving.
- You can switch hands if you like, this will help while you shave. It won't be natural at first but will get better with time. Keep in mind that you can use your dominant hand for the whole shave and still succeed.
- Keep your hand and anything else clear from the blade. If unsure, close the straight razor while not shaving, between passes.
- Make sure that you are not resting the blade on your face, chances are that you will cut yourself.
- Beware of distractions while shaving: Dog, cat, kids, SWMBO, etc.
- If the razor stops or catch the skin, stop!

- Try to keep your eyes clear at all time while shaving.
- If the razor is pulling, the blade is dull or your technique is off.

Post-Shave/Honing

- Make sure that your razor is dry! The last thing that you want is to find some rust or pitting! Some use mineral oil to prevent any rust, some don't.
- Buy a microscope or a jeweler loupe. This will help you see the edge while honing. The degree or how much you want to see is up to you. Having one is better than none.
- Read the interactive guides and ask questions if required!

Section 6 - 5, A Basic Straight Razor Shave

Before you start

This article assumes all pre-shave steps have been taken and the razor is stropped and shave-ready. Also, that you know how to hold the razor, and the importance of the blade angle. Finally, that you know how to create good lather.

The actual "shaving" part of using a straight razor is actually not very difficult, and pretty straight forward. Here, I am going to take you through a very basic straight razor shave, with, and across the grain. When first mastering your straight razor, I recommend not shaving against the grain, as the razor will provide a LOT more feedback than you may be used to, and if not confident in the strokes on your face against the grain, or in your abilities the razor may "hop" around on your face a bit and cut/irritate you. Shaving against the grain is nothing difficult if you have a sharp enough razor, but for the first few shaves, I would suggest keeping it simple.

Make sure that your razor is "shave ready". A brand new razor out of the box is *not* shave ready. A person, like a Honemeister, would need to sharpen your razor before the first usage.

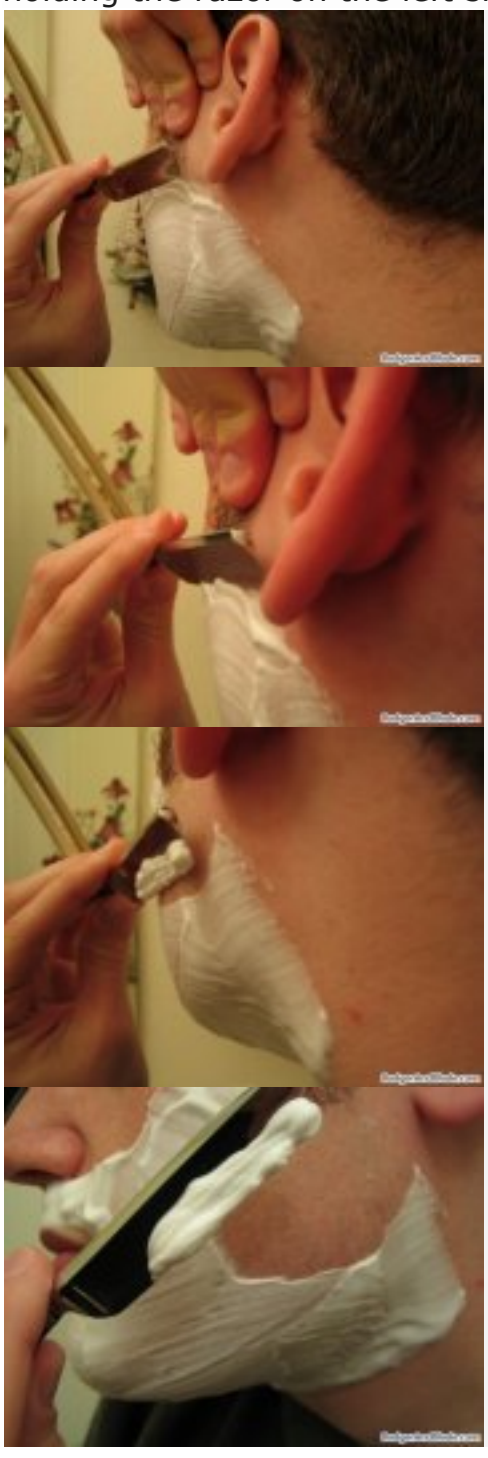
NOTE: After every few strokes you take, cutting hair off of your face, wash the lather off of the blade as it can become cumbersome. How often you have to rinse will depend on how often you change directions shaving (to change directions, you flip the blade, so shaving and accumulating lather on the blade will accumulate the lather on the outer half of the blade which will actually become the inner half of the blade when you flip the razor and switch sides, and ideally you don't want stubble filled lather all over your face) the size of

the razor, the richness/body of the lather etc. Some fellas are comfortable shaving with a TON of lather on their blade; others wash it off every few seconds. There is no right or wrong. Do what you are comfortable with.

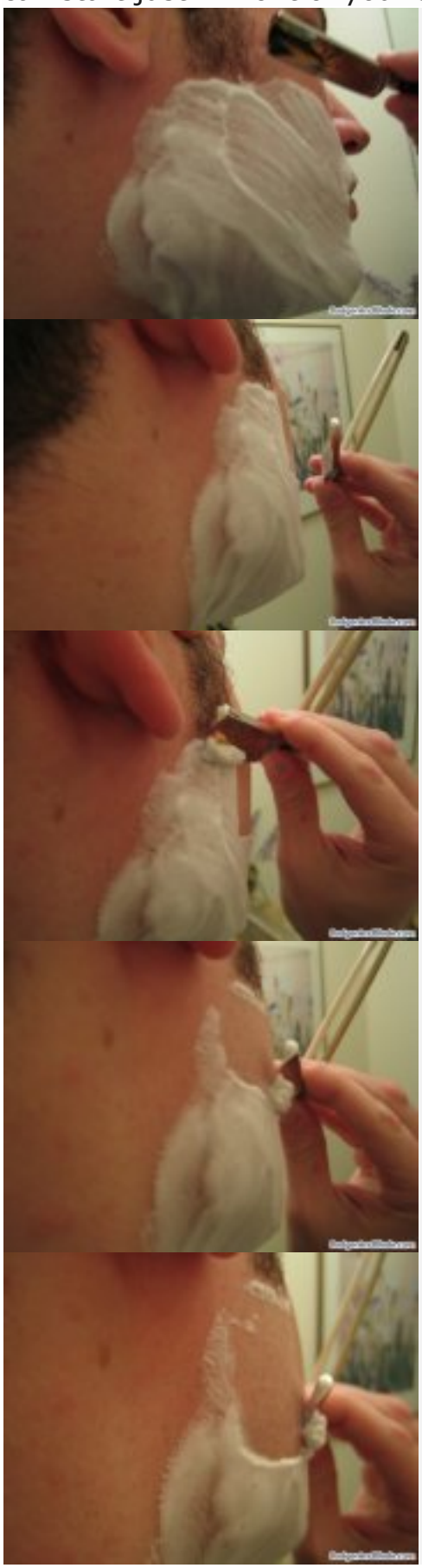
The Shave

First Pass (WTG)

Starting near your sideburn, use one hand to pull the skin on your face upwards so the skin is taut, and with your other hand slide the razor in small strokes from the edge of your sideburn, all the way down your cheek. Take note of the angle used in the pictures below. This is done for both sides of your face (right hand holding the razor on the right side of your face, left hand holding the razor on the left side of your face).



You can start at the sideburn area, then move to the area in front of it, or you can start just in front of your sideburn area as shown below.



With one hand, pull then skin of your neck taut and with the other shave your neck downwards or diagonally. Note, in the first picture below, it looks like I have already started to shave a little bit under the cheek. This is actually not the case. Since I had been pulling my skin taut, that portion of my skin was actually up near my cheek bone. This is a tricky area for some, as they do not pull the skin taut enough and have troubles getting a good shave around the jawline.

For your upper lip/moustache area, open your mouth, and use the muscles in your upper lip to further pull your upper lip downwards, thus getting the skin as taut as possible. Then simply shave this area downwards. Since it is such a small area, this can be accomplished quickly/easily in 2-3 strokes.

For many, the chin is the most difficult part of the face to shave, as for many, this is where the toughest hair on your face grows, and with a straight razor, you have to roll the shank of the razor in your hand gradually as you go around the chin, to your neck in order to keep the proper angle. To get the skin taut in this area, curl your lower lip over your teeth into your mouth and push your chin/jaw out, while simultaneously pulling the skin of your neck taut with your free hand. Before shaving, practice these weird facial contortions, feel the area before the contortion, then try to replicate what was described. If you are doing it correctly you should be able to feel your beard growth MUCH better. The better you can feel your beard growth based on the weird facial contortions you make, and stretching your skin, the better the razor will as well, which will result in a smoother/closer shave.

Do the above steps, making sure to use the same principles on both sides of the face. The only real difference will be the hand holding the razor.

Now that your face is shaven, wash your face with warm water and re-apply lather to your face with your shaving brush in the manner previously described.

Shaving across the grain (XTG)

NOTE: This is for the right side of your face, to shave the left side of your face, simply follow the instructions, keeping in mind you will be using the opposite hand to hold the razor with, and pull the skin taut.

While moving your lips/nose (almost in a kissing face) as far as you can to the left simultaneously pull the skin on your neck taut with your free (left) hand to get the skin on your cheek area as taught as possible in the direction you aim to have in. Use small strokes to shave across the grain on your cheek, but shave only ½ of the cheek.

Once you've shaved ½ of your check in this manner, use your free (left) hand to pull the area you had just shaved taut, so you are able to shave the remaining portion of your cheek, and part of your neck across the grain with your skin being pulled taut in the most aggressive/effective manner.

Notice how my left hand is really pulling the skin on my face taut.

Now, pull the skin taut further across the cheek, about ½ way across your cheek and shave the jawline area, as well as the corner of your neck (the corner of the neck, or the "jowls" are a problem spot for many, and as a result - pulling the skin up from the top of the cheek, and shaving this area is more effective than pulling the skin taut from the bottom/neck and shaving the area).

Pull the skin on your neck taut with your free hand, and shave in a slight diagonal manner the remaining portion left under that side of the neck.

the only area left on this side of your face that should have lather on it, is ½ of your chin. To shave this area across the grain, change which hand you are holding the razor (to the left hand) and with your right hand, pull the skin in that area taut. Then, simply shave across the grain and across your chin.

Repeat the same process as detailed above for the left side of your face, keeping in mind you will be using the opposite hand as above both to hold the razor with, and pull the skin taut with.

Special tip: Often, it can be hard for beginners to tell if their razor is cutting, and cutting well. Sometimes, it can be tricky to tell if the razor is cutting evenly as well (the razor could have been improperly honed and dull in one area) to check and see how well, if at all the razor is cutting, feeling ones face in the middle of a shave is difficult and messy, and what's more, it can be difficult to notice one area not being cut as effectively as another merely by touch. A neat, quick and easy way to find out how well your razor is cutting, and in different parts of the blade is to very lightly wipe some of the lather off of the blade in whatever spot you think might not be cutting well, or in any spot (if you don't think you have the right angle, and it's not cutting well) after you have taken a few strokes on your face and accumulated lather. What you'll see on your finger is how much (if any) hair is being cut off of your face. This can also be helpful when honing, or when you run into problematic blades.

Rinsing off the Blade

Wash off all of the lather from the blade with running water, then VERY carefully wipe ALL of the water off of the blade with a towel/cloth as shown below. Do not touch the cutting edge with the cloth directly - instead to make sure the edge is dry, do a very light stropping motion (on both sides of the razor) on the towel in a dry area of the towel.

Light stropping motion on the towel...

Now rinse your face off with cold water and apply an aftershave if required or desired. That's it! You've done it! Your first straight razor shave!

Section 6 - 6, Video of a straight razor shave.

This year I am celebrating 30 years of shaving with a straight. I thought that it would be fun to make a video, not to tell anyone how to do it but, rather, to show how I do it. So, here's my daily routine:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIM0Coix6Gg

Section 6 - 7, Common Shaving Problems and Solutions

The Problems

This page will attempt to cover the most common problems that a wetshaver will face during or after their shave. Not all problems are documented here, only the ones that are common.

During the shave

Lather

Problem: The lather is not working, it's thin, it disappears, there's no glide, what's going on?
Solution: Make sure that you have a product labeled "Shaving Cream" or "Shaving Soap" to start with. More product and/or more lather is likely required. Consult the Lathering tutorials for more information

Blade Angle/Shave is not close enough!

Problem: I am not cutting anything
Solution: The blade angle is likely to be the issue. Consult the blade angle page to help you rectify this

Blade Angle for DE, Blade angle for SE, Blade angle for Straight
Solution 2: Your DE razor is not assembled correctly, please verify that you have assembled your DE correctly - See this page

After the shave

It burns, Burns, BURNS!!!

Problem: Razor Burn
Solution: Razor burn is another word for irritation caused by shaving, usually resulting in red, irritated bumps on the skin. This can be caused by many things, including overly-aggressive shaving, improper razor angle causing scraping, shaving aggressively against the grain, and insufficient lubrication. Common treatments include witch hazel, alum blocks, and after-shave balms.

Bumps, red dots, it's itchy!

Problem: Ingrown hairs
Solution: Ingrown hairs, also referred to as "folliculitis" or " pseudofolliticus barbae " are a common problem with cartridge razors and electric razors which use a "lift and cut" action. Ingrowns are hairs which are shaved too close and then do not emerge from the follicle, but grow into the skin, causing painful bumps. Shaving with a DE or SE can reduce ingrown hairs, but many people are susceptible to them regardless of shaving regimen. Sometimes, Blade Angle (see above) is a factor.

One home remedy for ingrown hairs is to rub the bump lightly with a clean, dry, soft toothbrush, to exfoliate and free the trapped hair. You can also make a paste by crushing aspirin with a few drops of water. Apply the paste to the bump for five minutes, and then rinse it off.

Off-the-shelf solutions are typically lotions, creams or gels which contain chemicals exfoliating the skin. They help the skin to free the trapped hairs and grow out again. Common ingredients include salicylic acid (a precursor of aspirin), glycolic acid and lactic acid. Maximum allowed concentrations vary by region, but 2-3% are typical. Always follow application instructions, because some substances can cause redness and irritation if not used properly. If symptoms do not improve or worsen after a week, seek a dermatologist.

It's bleeding, ouch!

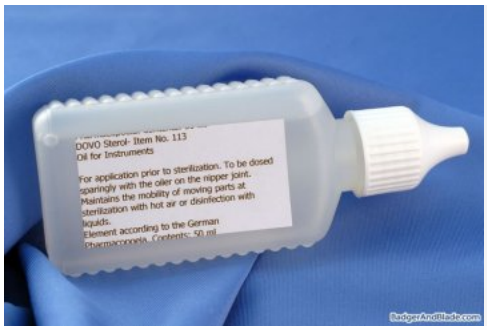
Problem: Nicks and cuts
Solution: Small cuts can occur during shaving, called "nicks" or "weepers." Often they stop bleeding by themselves, especially after a cold water rinse following the shave. For those that do not stop bleeding, an astringent/styptic/antihemorrhagic such as a wet styptic pencil can be applied for a few moments, or an alum block run over the skin. For minor nicks, witch hazel's astringent effect can be sufficient to close the nick.

Section 7, The straight razor shave

Section 7 - 1, Caring for your Carbon or Stainless Steel Razor

So, a single straight razor can, and will provide generations worth of smooth shaves with minimal care/maintenance, but what maintenance is required for Carbon VS Stainless steel razors?

Carbon Steel


DOVO Sterol- Item No. 113
Oil for Instruments
For application prior to sterilization. To be dosed sparingly with the oiler on the nipper joint. Maintains the mobility of moving parts at sterilization with hot air or disinfection with liquids.
Element according to the German Pharmacopoeia. Contents: 50 ml

Although they require more care/attention than a stainless steel razor, care is still by and large trivial. Personally, I live in the San Francisco Bay Area, and have never had an issue with humidity, and even on my most sensitive straight razors with gold washes/inlays (depending on the Karat, gold often tarnishes/attracts rust quicker than the carbon steel) I do not need to apply any anti-rust/corrosion product and do no have to do any extra maintenance on my Carbon steel razors. I simply thoroughly dry off my razor after each shave. If you live in a VERY humid climate however you may need to coat your razors blade with a protective oil, such as Dovo Sterol (see picture right) after each shave: however this is only required in the most humid conditions.

An easier method many employ, is the use of a product called Tuf-Glide which comes in a small bottle, or Tuf-Cloth which is a cloth impregnated with the Tuf-Glide liquid. Tuf-cloth/glide are basically rubbed into the razors steel, allowed to dry, then buffed (with a paper towel, or cotton towel) to a shine. The "Tuf" products "micro-bond" and provide quite a bit of protection against rust/corrosion, and do not have to be applied very frequently, say every few months if used daily in a very humid climate. Whenever you store a carbon steel razor for extended periods of time however, make sure to give it a good coat of Dovo Sterol. RIG Gun Grease, or Tuf-Cloth before putting it in a drawer for extended periods of time.

Caring for your Carbon or Stainless Steel razor

TUF-
GLIDE
Micro-Bonding
Dry Lubricant
&
Protectant
POINT ACCURACY!
BadgerAndBlade.com

Entry Solutions Ltd.
BadgerAndBlade.com

Remington
Mini-dehumidifier Model 365
BadgerAndBlade.com

If you happen to live in an exceptionally humid environment, coating your blade with oil after each shave isn't very practical, and a coating of Tuff Cloth (or glide) may not make you comfortable enough for you expensive, and treasured razors. What to do? Well, I recommend creating a de-humidifier for your razors, which is quick, easy and inexpensive. Basically, the idea is to create a reverse humidifier, so you can actually use a Cigar Humidifier, or any container that is air-tight or somewhat close to air tight. Get Sylica Crystal bags, or a dehumidifier pack which you can find at guns stores (gents put them in their gun safes to keep their prized firearms rust free) and sporting good stores for well under $10. If you really want to get fancy, for $24 Remington makes a Mini-Dehumidifier that is electronic. However it has no wires, and you plug it in every 2 months or so, and it recharges itself and this will keep your razor storage container bone dry. Just to be obsessively safe, apply some tuff cloth/glide to the razor every few months. Basically, day to day maintenance this method in a very humid environment is merely shaving with the razor, thoroughly drying it on a towel, then placing it in your special "razor dehumidifier" box. Every few months, re-tuff cloth/glide the blade, and you're good to go! Thiers Issard, and several other companies make some pretty handsome razor boxes with glass lids as well, which can be converted into dehumidifiers if you so desire, to have a very sharp looking setup.

Stainless Steel

Stainless steel razors typically do not require any special oiling/treatment for most area/conditions. Stainless steel however CAN rust/corrode, as it is not stain-proof steel, it is stain LESS steel. In VERY humid conditions, you will still need to keep a coating of protective oil on the blade, or periodically tuff cloth/glide the blade/pivot. For most however, a stainless steel razors blade will never need to be oiled/protected.

No matter what type of steel the razors blade is made of, or the conditions the razor is stored in, periodically apply a VERY small amount of oil to the hinge to keep it in good working order.

Section 7 - 2, Caring for your Razor Scales

By and large little to nothing needs to be done to modern straight razors scales. Of course with everything there can be exceptions, but for me personally I do not apply anything to my new straight razor scales. The only time I apply a product to straight razor scales, it is a VERY old horn scales razor, and the horn looks very chalky/dried out. In this case, I apply just a tiny amount of horn oil (see picture below) to the scales to give them a brilliant shine/luster, but by and large this is not necessary. Some recommend treating ivory, and some woods with oil and such, but I haven't found this necessary.

Section 7 - 3, Metal Polish and Straight Razor

Flitz, Mass, Metal glo... all useful products... and all work about equally well. However, how do you know where, when and why to use them? Well, let's first start with why. Using a metal polish is done primarily to remove rust/corrosion from your razor. It however can also be used to lightly polish up certain types of razor scales, and brass inlays on razor scales (such as the ducks on a dubl duck razor), which will bring them to a brilliant luster.

When to use a metal polish

Typically you'll use a metal polish on old eBay razors to remove grime, rust and corrosion. Often, you can turn a pretty homely looking razor into a gleaming beauty with some metal polish and elbow grease. Less frequently, you might use metal polish to remove a stray water spot on the blade, which would be a more precise application, whereby you'd take a very small amount of polish and put it on a Q-Tip, and lightly rub the water spot out of the metal.

When/Where NOT to use metal polish

Basically, you'll want to shy away from using metal polish on any gold wash on the blade or spine, and/or light etchings on blades, as often - metal polish will quickly swirl and remove these pretty attributes.